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# Luminescence and energy transfer processes in $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$

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$\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{AlO}_3$  and  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$  samples were synthesized using a solid-state reaction method. Structural analysis revealed that the samples crystallized in an orthorhombic structure phase with a *Pbnm* space group. The average crystallite sizes were around 283 nm and 574 nm for  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{AlO}_3$  and  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$ , respectively. Derivative absorption spectrum fitting (DASF) and first-derivative reflectance ( $dR/d\lambda$ ) methods confirmed that the samples possess a direct wide band gap, with energies of 5.93 eV and 5.90 eV, respectively. The photoluminescence (PL) spectrum of  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{AlO}_3$  under  $\lambda_{\text{ex}} = 377$  nm excitation exhibits a green emission and intense sharp red lines at 680 nm, 697 nm, 705 nm, 717 nm and 758 nm. The green emission corresponds to the transitions  $^2\text{H}_{11/2} \rightarrow ^4\text{I}_{15/2}$  and  $^4\text{S}_{3/2} \rightarrow ^4\text{I}_{15/2}$  of  $\text{Er}^{3+}$  ions, while the sharp red lines are attributed to transitions between intrinsic defect centers related to the  $\text{GdAlO}_3$  host coupled to  $\text{B}_{3g}$  (4) and  $\text{B}_{1g}$  (7) vibrational modes. Efficient energy transfer via resonant phonon-assisted and cross-relaxation processes from  $\text{Er}^{3+}$  and intrinsic defect centers to  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  is responsible for the decrease in green and red emission line intensities in  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$ . The energy transfer from  $\text{Er}^{3+}$  and intrinsic defect centers indicates that red emission lines at 697 nm and 726 nm in  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$  mainly originate from the  $^2\text{T}_1$  ( $^2\text{G}$ )  $\rightarrow$   $^4\text{A}_2$  ( $^4\text{F}$ ) and  $^2\text{E}_g$  ( $^2\text{G}$ )  $\rightarrow$   $^4\text{A}_{2g}$  ( $^4\text{F}$ ) transitions of  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  ions.

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## 1. Introduction

Perovskite compounds serve as excellent host materials for various optical applications due to their chemical and thermal stability.<sup>1,2</sup> They follow the generic formula  $\text{ABO}_3$ . Rare-earth orthoaluminates ( $\text{REAlO}_3$ ), such as gadolinium aluminate ( $\text{GdAlO}_3$ ), possess significant optical, thermal, and mechanical properties, making them appropriate as solid-state laser hosts.<sup>3</sup>  $\text{GdAlO}_3$  is also known for its relatively high dielectric constant, making it valuable for electronic applications, and is being developed as a potential material for neutron absorption and control rod applications.<sup>4</sup> In cubic perovskites, the tolerance factor is  $t_{\text{obs}}=1$ ,<sup>5</sup> whereas for  $\text{GdAlO}_3$  with the *Pbnm* space group,  $t_{\text{obs}} = 0.986$ ,<sup>6</sup> indicating a slight distortion from the cubic structure.  $\text{GdAlO}_3$ , formed with  $\text{Gd}^{3+}$  ions having a relatively large ion radius (180.4 pm), closely approaches the ideal cubic perovskite crystal cell ( $\text{Pm}\bar{3}\text{m}$ ).  $\text{GdAlO}_3$  with the *Pbnm* space group demonstrates a high accommodation capacity within the perovskite structure and assists in the modulation of its electronic and spectroscopic properties through the substitution of

$\text{Gd}^{3+}$  with various rare-earth activators (e.g.,  $\text{Eu}^{3+}$ ,  $\text{Er}^{3+}$ ,  $\text{Tb}^{3+}$ ,  $\text{Ce}^{3+}$ ,  $\text{Yb}^{3+}$ ,  $\text{Dy}^{3+}$ ) and  $\text{Al}^{3+}$  with a transition metal activator ion such as  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  and  $\text{Mn}^{4+}$ . In this structure, the  $\text{Gd}^{3+}$  ion occupies a non-centrosymmetric site, leading to mixing of the  $4f^n$  states with the first excited configuration  $4f^{n-1}5d$ . This mixing is caused by the odd terms in the crystal field, and is responsible for the strength of induced electric dipole transitions.  $\text{GdAlO}_3$  with the *Pbnm* space group is appropriate for generating intense  $4f$  electric dipole transitions, thereby enabling efficient luminescence. In recent years, trivalent rare-earth ions ( $\text{RE}^{3+}$ ) and transition-metal fluorescence in diverse host matrices have attracted significant attention due to their applications in persistent luminescent materials, photo-functional materials and luminescence thermometry.<sup>7–10</sup> Doping  $\text{GdAlO}_3$  with transition metals and rare-earth ions is therefore of great interest for the development of advanced optical materials.  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$ , in particular, is a transition-metal ion that acts as both a trapping and recombination center and has been widely studied in persistent luminescence research. Its unique properties can enhance the performance of imaging techniques, providing valuable insights into biological systems for *in vivo* bioimaging.<sup>11,12</sup> However, the concentration of  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  must be carefully optimized: a low concentration results in weak luminescence, whereas a high concentration leads to quenching, thereby reducing both the intensity and afterglow duration. A recent study by Jinan Xu *et al.*<sup>13</sup> demonstrated that  $\text{La}_{0.9898}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Sm}_{0.0002}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$

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exhibits long-term persistent luminescence at 1553 nm due to the  $\text{Er}^{3+}$ : ( $^4\text{I}_{13/2} \rightarrow ^4\text{I}_{15/2}$ ) transition, as well as at 734 nm, due to the  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$ : ( $^2\text{E} (^2\text{G}) \rightarrow ^4\text{A}_2 (^4\text{F})$ ) transition. In  $\text{ZnGa}_2\text{O}_4:\text{Cr}^{3+14}$  the persistent luminescence intensity increases with  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  concentration up to 0.4–0.6%, after which concentration quenching reduces both intensity and lifetime. Moreover, in recent studies, the emission intensity of  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  reaches its optimum at 0.5 mol%  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  concentration and can be further enhanced by  $\text{Li}^+$  ion in  $\text{Cr}^{3+}/\text{Li}^+$  co-doping  $\text{ZnGa}_2\text{O}_4$  phosphor<sup>15</sup>. The lifetimes of the  $^4\text{T}_2 (^4\text{F})$  and  $^2\text{E}$  states of  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  decrease with increasing concentrations of  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  and  $\text{Cr}^{3+}/\text{Li}^+$  ions.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, a recent study reported by Ekta Rai *et al.*<sup>16</sup> demonstrated that in  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  and  $\text{Eu}^{3+}$  co-doped  $\text{LaVO}_4$ , the emission intensity is optimal at 0.5 mol%  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  and 1 mol%  $\text{Eu}^{3+}$  concentration. The emission intensity at 614 nm, corresponding to the  $^5\text{D}_0 \rightarrow ^7\text{F}_2$  transition in the  $\text{Eu}^{3+}$  doped  $\text{LaVO}_4$  phosphor, reduces when  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  ion is co-doped due to energy transfer between  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  and  $\text{Eu}^{3+}$ .<sup>16</sup> This energy transfer was confirmed by the decrease of the lifetime of the  $^5\text{D}_0$  level of  $\text{Eu}^{3+}$  ions in  $\text{Eu}^{3+}$ ,  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  co-doped  $\text{LaVO}_4$  phosphor.<sup>16</sup> Understanding the energy levels of dopant ions, traps states, in  $\text{GdAlO}_3$  host and the energy transfer process between them is crucial for evaluating the suitability of material for optical applications such as LEDs, plant growth lighting, and *in vivo* optical imaging. The experimental origin of luminescence in  $\text{GdAlO}_3$  is studied by K Dhahri *et al.*<sup>17</sup> The energy levels of  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  combined with various trivalent lanthanides in  $\text{GdAlO}_3$  have been studied by Hongde Luo and Pieter Dorenbos<sup>18</sup>. However, to the best of our knowledge,  $\text{Er}^{3+}$ ,  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  Co-doped  $\text{GdAlO}_3$  has not yet been explored. Taking this into account, the present work reports for the first time the synthesis and investigation of a  $\text{Er}^{3+}$ ,  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  co-doped  $\text{GdAlO}_3$ . This study aims to elucidate the energy transfer process occurring between  $\text{Er}^{3+}$ ,  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$ , and traps states (intrinsic defects). Furthermore, based on both experimental results and theoretical optical considerations, we propose a detailed mechanism for the energy transfer involving  $\text{Er}^{3+}$ ,  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$ , and the trap states.

## 2. Experimental procedures (synthesis and characterization)

The  $\text{GdAlO}_3$ ,  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{AlO}_3$  and  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$  samples were prepared using a conventional solid-state reaction method.  $\text{Gd}_2\text{O}_3$  (99%),  $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$  (99%),  $\text{Cr}_2\text{O}_3$  (99%), and  $\text{Er}_2\text{O}_3$  (99%) were used as starting raw materials in stoichiometric amounts. The precursor materials were ground into fine powders using an agate mortar. The powders were initially annealed at 700 °C and then reground, pestled, and gradually heated to 1200 °C in an alumina crucible, where they were sintered for four hours. Finally, the powders were pressed into pellets with an 8 mm diameter. Several techniques were employed to characterize the physical and structural properties of the compounds. The phase compositions of  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{AlO}_3$  and  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$  were identified by X-ray diffraction (XRD) measurements using a Siemens D5000 X-ray powder diffractometer utilizing  $\text{CuK}_\alpha$  radiation ( $\lambda = 1.5406 \text{ \AA}$ ) over a range of 20°–100°, with a step size of 0.02°. The powder

morphology and chemical homogeneity were studied by scanning electron microscopy (SEM) using a TESCAN VEGA3 SBH instrument equipped with an energy dispersive microscopy (EDS) detector. Raman spectra were recorded in the range of 50–1100  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  using a Horiba LabRam HR Evolution micro-Raman confocal system, with wavelength laser excitations at  $\lambda = 532 \text{ nm}$ , 633 nm, and 785 nm. Absorption and reflectance spectra were recorded using a (SHIMADZU, UV-3101PC) UV–vis–IR spectrophotometer. Photoluminescence emission (PL) and excitation (PLE) measurements were recorded using a Horiba-Jobin-Yvon Fluorolog 322 spectrometer in time-resolved mode, using a pulsed lamp with a 0.05 ms post-flash delay.

## 3. Results and discussions

### 3.1. Structural analysis

**3.1.1. Crystal structure and X-ray diffraction patterns.** The XRD pattern analysis of the  $\text{GdAlO}_3$ ,  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{AlO}_3$ , and  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$  samples was performed at room temperature and is shown in Fig. 1(a)–(c). The XRD data were refined using the Rietveld method in the Full Prof software suite.<sup>19</sup> The diffraction peaks align closely with the crystal planes of the orthorhombic  $\text{GdAlO}_3$  structure all diffraction peaks are indexed according to the PDF card no. 46-0395.<sup>20</sup> Refinement results indicate that all samples crystallize in the orthorhombic  $\text{GdAlO}_3$  structure phase with the *Pbnm* space group.<sup>20</sup> The estimated Rietveld refinement parameters, including the goodness of fit ( $\chi^2$ ), reliability factors (*R*-profile factor, *R*-Bragg factor, and *R*-crystallographic factor), lattice parameters, cell volumes (*V*), and interatomic distances, are listed in Table 1. The crystal structure of  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$  and  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{AlO}_3$  compounds using VESTA software is presented in Fig. 2. The average crystallite size ( $D_{\text{sc}}$ ) was estimated from the line broadening of the peak with the highest intensity associated with the plane (112), using the Debye–Scherrer formula.<sup>21</sup>

$$D_{\text{sc}} = \frac{K\lambda}{\beta \cos \theta} \quad (1)$$

where  $K = 0.9$  for spherical shape,  $\lambda$  is the wavelength of X-ray used,  $\beta$  is the full width at half maximum (FWHM) of the diffraction peak, and  $\theta$  is the Bragg angle for the most intense peak. Furthermore, XRD peak broadening also has a contribution from the self-induced strain ( $\varepsilon$ ) developed in crystallites during the growth that is effective in the nanoparticles.<sup>22</sup> We additionally used the Williamson–Hall equation:<sup>23</sup>

$$\beta_{hkl} \cos \theta = \frac{K\lambda}{D_{\text{W-H}}} + \varepsilon 4 \sin \theta \quad (2)$$

to determine the crystallite size and strain, taking into account the contribution of crystallites and strain to peak broadening. Where  $K$  is a constant ( $K = 0.9$  for spherical shape),  $\lambda$  is the wavelength of the used X-ray,  $\beta$  is the full width at half maximum (FWHM) of the diffraction peak, and  $\varepsilon$  is the effective strain and  $\theta$  is the Bragg angle for the most intense peak. Eqn (2) represents the Uniform Deformation Model (UDM), which assumes uniform strain in all crystallographic directions. The



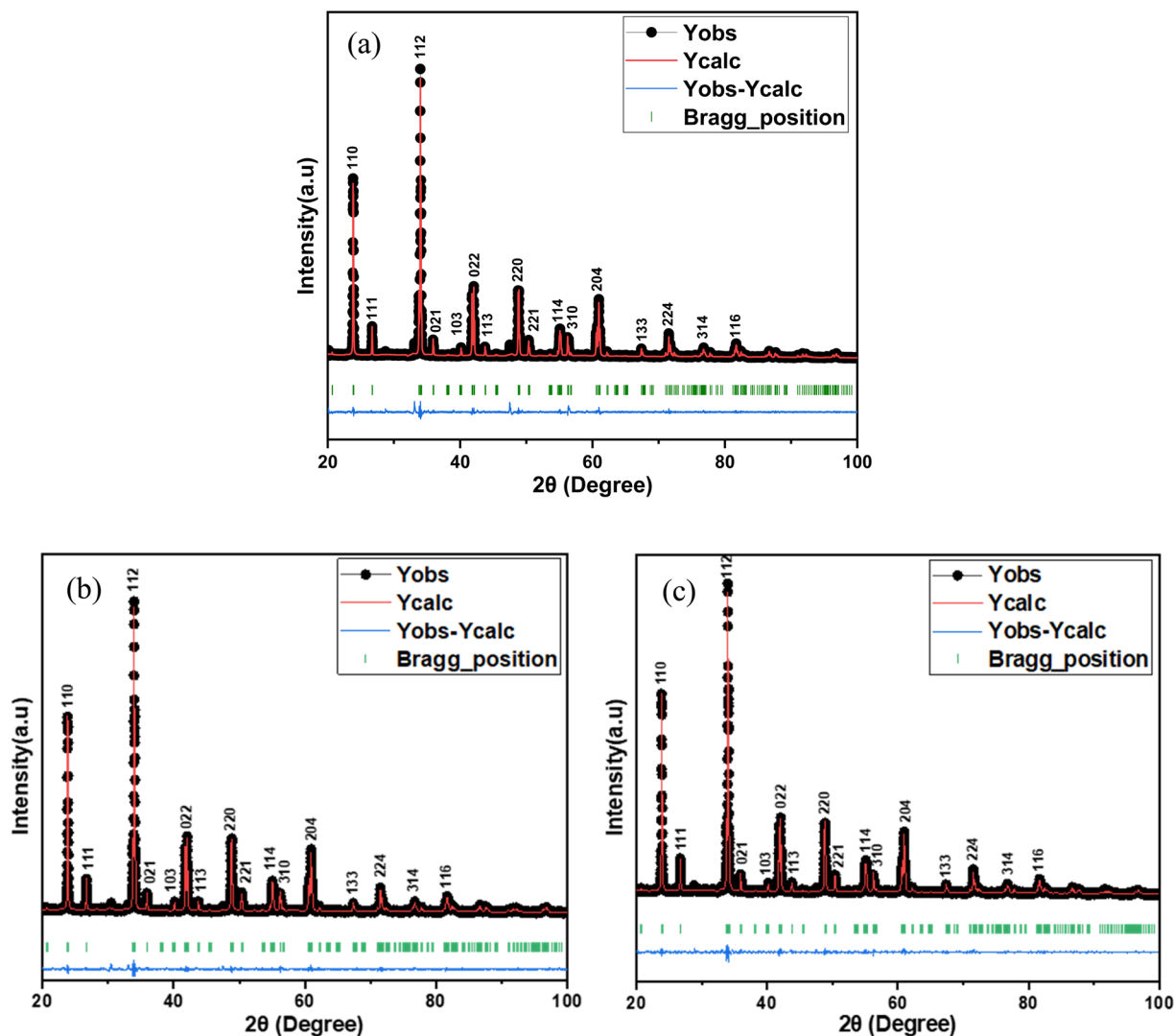


Fig. 1 Rietveld refinement of X-ray diffraction pattern of (a)  $\text{GdAlO}_3$  (b)  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{AlO}_3$  and (c)  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$ .

**Table 1** Refined crystallographic parameters, average particle size and average strain value of  $\text{GdAlO}_3$ ,  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{AlEr}_{0.01}\text{O}_3$  and  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$  samples

Compounds	$\text{GdAlO}_3$	$\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{AlEr}_{0.01}\text{O}_3$	$\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$
$a$ (Å)	5.253(2)	5.253(8)	5.253(6)
$b$ (Å)	5.302(5)	5.303(7)	5.302(5)
$c$ (Å)	7.447(2)	7.448(6)	7.447(8)
$v$ (Å <sup>3</sup> )	207.442(4)	207.552(1)	207.474(9)
$d_{(\text{Gd-Gd})}$	—	3.736(7)	3.804(8)
$d_{(\text{Gd-Al})}$	—	3.072(3)	3.266(8)
$\chi^2$	1.853	1.389	1.46
$R_p$ (%)	12.3	11.7	14.8
$R_{wp}$ (%)	11.5	10.4	12.0
$R_e$ (%)	8.43	8.81	9.93
$D_{sc}$ (nm)	—	108.5(6)	111.0(2)
$D_{W-H}$ (nm)	—	283.1(4)	574.3(8)
$D_{SEM}$ (nm)	—	300	639
$\varepsilon$	—	0.00076(1)	0.00086(6)

term ( $\beta \cos \theta$ ) is plotted with respect to ( $4 \sin \theta$ ) in Fig. 3 for the preferred orientation peaks (hkl) of  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{AlO}_3$  and  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$  samples showing that with the y-intercept and slope of the fitted line determining the crystallite size and related strain, respectively. The lattice strain observed is attributed to defects concentrated along the amorphous grain boundaries. These defects create a stress field within the grain boundary region, thereby inducing strain in the system.<sup>24</sup> Table 1 displays the crystallite size estimated from Debye Scherrer's formula and W-H plot as well as the related strain. The crystallite size increases considerably with  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  doping.  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  incorporation can increase both crystallite and particle size in certain oxide materials. When small amounts of  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  ions substitute the cation  $\text{Al}^{3+}$  in the  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{AlEr}_{0.01}\text{O}_3$  host lattice, they can induce lattice strain, modify the crystal growth process, and reduce the number of nucleation sites, leading to larger crystallites and particles. This effect is noticeable at low doping levels, as seen in  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$ -doped gadolinium aluminum garnet and doped  $\text{Mn}_3\text{O}_4$  systems.<sup>25–28</sup> This fact explains the considerable



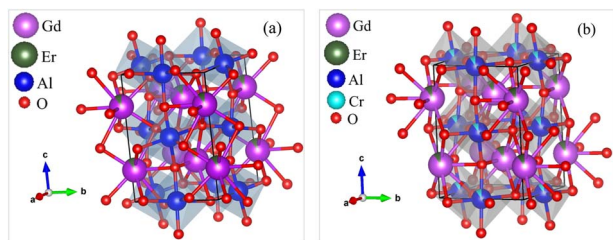


Fig. 2 The Crystal structure using VESTA software for (a)  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{AlO}_3$  and (b)  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$  compounds.

increase of both crystallite and particle size of  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{AlEr}_{0.01}\text{O}_3$  by  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  doping with low concentrations. However, as the doping concentration increases further, excessive lattice distortion can inhibit growth, resulting in smaller crystallites and particles, a trend seen in several oxide systems.<sup>25,26,28</sup>

**3.1.2. SEM and EDS analysis.** The morphological characterization of  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$  and  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{AlO}_3$  compounds was carried out using scanning electron microscopy (SEM), as illustrated in Fig. 4(a) and (b), respectively. The SEM images show that the particles are approximately spherical. Due to the high surface energy of the nanoparticles, the synthesized samples exhibit noticeable aggregation at the annealing temperature.<sup>29</sup> The grain size distribution, shown in the inset of Fig. 4(a) and (b), was analyzed using Image J software, and the resulting histograms were fitted to a Lorentzian function. The average grain size distribution revealed peaks around 300 nm for  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{AlO}_3$  and 639 nm for  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$  as presented in Fig. 4(a) and (b), and summarized in Table 1. Furthermore, energy dispersive spectra (EDS) were recorded for both samples, as illustrated in Fig. 4(c) and (d). The EDS spectra confirm the existence of the expected constituent elements: Gd, Er, Al, Cr, and O. These results further confirm the compositional purity of the synthesized compound.

**3.1.3. Raman spectra analysis of  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{AlEr}_{0.01}\text{O}_3$  and  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$  compounds.** Raman spectroscopy is a powerful technique that extracts information on the development of the desired phase, detecting impurities, and identifying structural defects by examining Raman active phonon modes. The Raman spectra of  $\text{GdAlO}_3$  in the orthorhombic

(*Pbnm*) perovskite structure have been studied both theoretically and experimentally by Anastasia Chopelas.<sup>30</sup> For  $\text{GdAlO}_3$  with the orthorhombic (*Pbnm*) structure, group theory predicts the following optical modes in the Brillouin zone center.<sup>30</sup>

$$\Gamma' = 7\text{Ag}^{\text{R}} + 5\text{B}_{1\text{g}}^{\text{R}} + 7\text{B}_{2\text{g}}^{\text{R}} + 5\text{B}_{3\text{g}}^{\text{R}} + 8\text{A}_\text{u}(1) + 7\text{B}_{1\text{u}}^{\text{R}} + 9\text{B}_{2\text{u}}(\text{IR}) + 9\text{B}_{3\text{u}}(\text{IR}) \quad (3)$$

where *R* and IR denote, respectively, their Raman and infrared spectral activity. Fig. 5 and 6 display the Raman spectra of  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{AlO}_3$  and  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$  respectively, recorded using excitation wavelengths of 532 nm, 633 nm, and 785 nm. By comparing the spectra obtained with various excitation wavelengths, it is possible to distinguish between Raman scattering and luminescence based on their distinct natures: bands with fixed locations are true Raman bands, whereas bands that shift in position are associated with luminescence.<sup>31</sup> By extending the collection range to  $1100\text{ cm}^{-1}$ , our measurement revealed several intense and clearly non-vibrational extra bands above  $579\text{ cm}^{-1}$ . These bands were attributed to fluorescence as they resemble the characteristic f–f transitions of trivalent lanthanide ions. The appearance of resonance Raman, resonance fluorescence and relaxed fluorescence can be attributed to the excitation energies of the wavelength's excitation 532 nm, 633 nm, and 785 nm which are resonant with the transitions  $^4\text{I}_{15/2} \rightarrow ^4\text{S}_{3/2}$ ,  $^4\text{I}_{15/2} \rightarrow ^4\text{F}_{9/2}$ ,  $^4\text{I}_{15/2} \rightarrow ^4\text{I}_{9/2}$  of  $\text{Er}^{3+}$ , respectively.<sup>32</sup> Raman spectra of  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{AlO}_3$  and  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$  collected with 532 nm laser excitation are shown in Fig. 5 (a) and 6(a). They present prominent peaks at  $330\text{ cm}^{-1}$ ,  $355\text{ cm}^{-1}$ ,  $403\text{ cm}^{-1}$ ,  $468\text{ cm}^{-1}$ ,  $507\text{ cm}^{-1}$ ,  $545\text{ cm}^{-1}$ ,  $579\text{ cm}^{-1}$  assigned respectively to Resonance Raman and resonance fluorescence associated to the vibrations modes  $\text{B}_{3\text{g}}(3)$ ,  $\text{Ag}(5)$ ,  $\text{B}_{3\text{g}}(4)$ ,  $\text{B}_{2\text{g}}(4)$ ,  $\text{B}_{1\text{g}}(6)$ ,  $\text{B}_{3\text{g}}(5)$ ,  $\text{B}_{1\text{g}}(7)$ .<sup>30</sup> The peaks at  $281\text{ cm}^{-1}$ ,  $625\text{ cm}^{-1}$ ,  $677\text{ cm}^{-1}$ ,  $734\text{ cm}^{-1}$ ,  $807\text{ cm}^{-1}$ ,  $892\text{ cm}^{-1}$ ,  $947\text{ cm}^{-1}$ ,  $1026\text{ cm}^{-1}$  are assigned to the vibration modes  $2\text{B}_{2\text{g}}(1)$ ,  $2\text{A}_\text{g}(4)$ ,  $2\text{B}_{3\text{g}}(3)$ ,  $2\text{A}_\text{g}(5)$ ,  $2\text{B}_{3\text{g}}(4)$ ,  $2\text{A}_\text{g}(6)$ ,  $2\text{B}_{2\text{g}}(4)$ ,  $2\text{B}_{1\text{g}}(6)$ <sup>30</sup> related to relaxed fluorescence. The bands of Raman spectra of  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{AlO}_3$  and  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$  recorded with 785 nm laser excitation in the vicinity of  $1000\text{ cm}^{-1}$  are clearly due to relaxed fluorescence. Some vibration modes such  $\text{Ag}(3)$  at  $235\text{ cm}^{-1}$  (ref. 30) occur only under 785 nm excitation, the vibrations mode  $\text{B}_{1\text{g}}(3)$  at  $220\text{ cm}^{-1}$  appear only under 633 nm

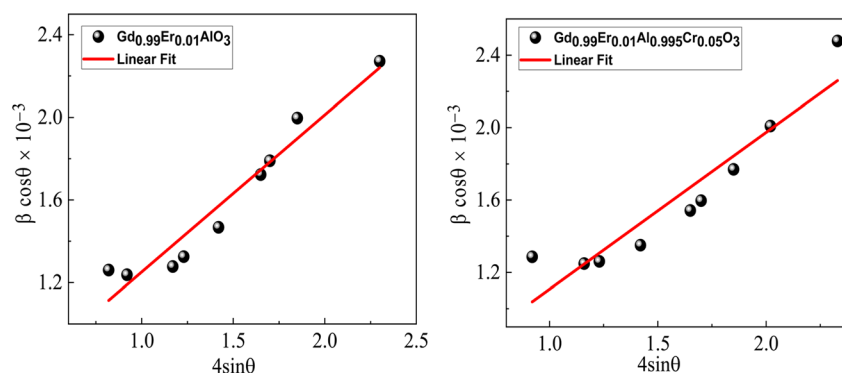


Fig. 3 W–H plots of  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{AlO}_3$  and  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$  compounds.





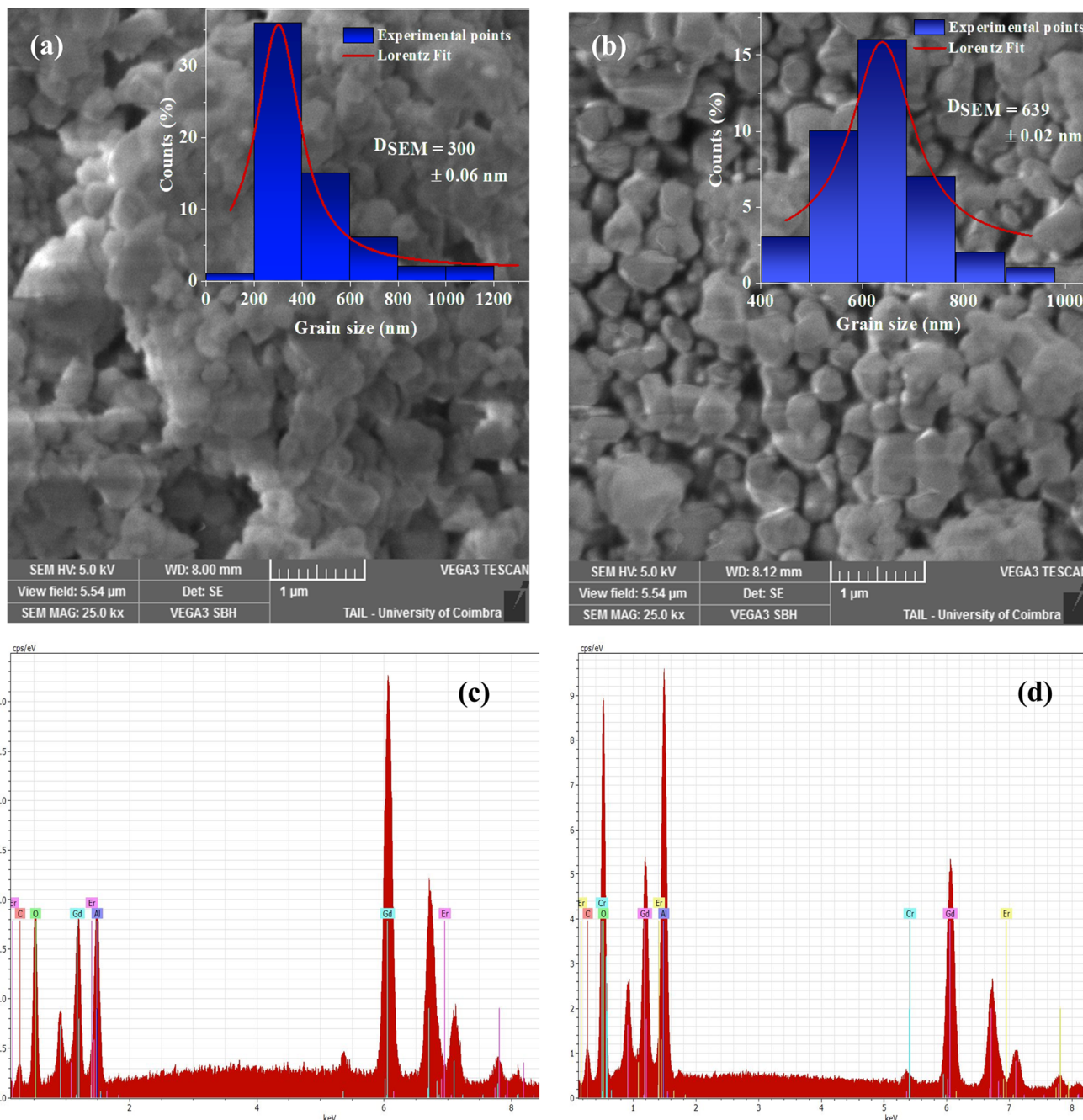


Fig. 4 (a and b) SEM micrographs, with the inset showing the size distribution histogram for  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{AlO}_3$  and  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$  compounds, (c and d) spectra of chemical analysis for  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{AlO}_3$  and  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$  compounds.

excitation, whereas the vibrations mode at  $\text{Ag}(4)$  at  $314\text{ cm}^{-1}$  appear only under  $633\text{ nm}$  excitation. The bands at  $403\text{ cm}^{-1}$  and  $579\text{ cm}^{-1}$  due to  $\text{B}_{3g}(4)$  and  $\text{B}_{1g}(7)$  vibration modes are true Raman bands since they have fixed locations and do not depend on the wavelength excitation. They appear under all the wavelengths excitations of  $532\text{ nm}$ ,  $633\text{ nm}$ , and  $785\text{ nm}$ .

### 3.2. Optical properties

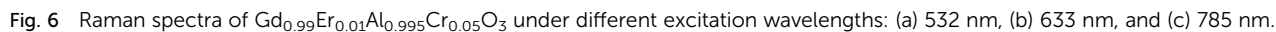
**3.2.1. Absorbance, reflectance spectra and band gap determination.** The wavelength-dependent absorbance spectra

of  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{AlO}_3$  and  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$ , recorded in the  $200\text{--}2500\text{ nm}$  range, are illustrated in Fig. 7. Both spectra exhibit an intense absorption band at  $246\text{ nm}$  and two weaker bands at  $975\text{ nm}$  and  $1535\text{ nm}$ . With  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  co-doping, an additional broad band appears at  $565\text{ nm}$ . The absorption band at  $246\text{ nm}$  is assigned to  $^8\text{S}_{7/2} \rightarrow ^6\text{D}_{7/2}$  transition of  $\text{Gd}^{3+}$  ions,<sup>33</sup> whereas the peaks at  $975\text{ nm}$  and  $1535\text{ nm}$  correspond to the  $^4\text{I}_{15/2} \rightarrow ^4\text{I}_{11/2}$  and  $^4\text{I}_{15/2} \rightarrow ^4\text{I}_{13/2}$ , transitions of  $\text{Er}^{3+}$  ions,<sup>32</sup> respectively. The additional broad band in the absorbance spectrum of  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$  at  $565\text{ nm}$  is assigned to the  $^4\text{A}_2(^4\text{F}) \rightarrow ^4\text{T}_2(^4\text{F})$  transition of  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  ions. The band gap





by Souri and Tahan,<sup>34</sup> was used to ascertain the band gap's value and nature. The main advantage of this method is that it does not require any presumption of the nature of the optical



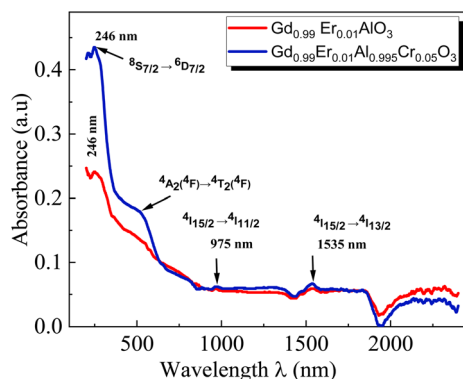


Fig. 7 Absorbance spectra of  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{AlO}_3$  and  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$  samples at room temperature in the wavelength range 200–2500 nm.

transition and linear extrapolation. The absorption coefficient can be expressed as a function of the optical gap and the energy of photons as follows:<sup>35,36</sup>

$$\alpha(\nu)h\nu = B(h\nu - E_g)^m \quad (4)$$

By rewriting the eqn (1) as a function of the wavelength ( $\lambda$ ): eqn (4) become:

$$\alpha(\lambda) = B(hc)^{m-1} \lambda \left( \frac{1}{\lambda} - \frac{1}{\lambda_g} \right)^m \quad (5)$$

where  $\alpha(\lambda)$ , is the absorption coefficient defined by the Beer–Lambert's law as:

$$\alpha(\lambda) = \frac{2.303A(\lambda)}{d} \quad (6)$$

where  $d$  and  $A$  as film thickness and film absorbance. Using (5) and (6); the absorbance can be rewritten as:

$$A(\lambda) = D \times \lambda \left( \frac{1}{\lambda} - \frac{1}{\lambda_g} \right)^m \quad (7)$$

where:  $D = \frac{dB(hc)^{m-1}}{2.303}$ .

According to eqn (7) we have:

$$\frac{A(\lambda)}{\lambda} = D \times \left( \frac{1}{\lambda} - \frac{1}{\lambda_g} \right)^m \quad (8)$$

Eqn (8) can be reformulated as follows:

$$\ln \left( \frac{A(\lambda)}{\lambda} \right) = m \ln \left( \frac{1}{\lambda} - \frac{1}{\lambda_g} \right) + \ln D \quad (9)$$

By differentiating  $\ln \left( \frac{A(\lambda)}{\lambda} \right)$  with respect to  $\frac{1}{\lambda}$ , we obtained the following equation:

$$\frac{d \ln \left( \frac{A(\lambda)}{\lambda} \right)}{d \left( \frac{1}{\lambda} \right)} = \frac{m}{\left( \frac{1}{\lambda} - \frac{1}{\lambda_g} \right)} \quad (10)$$

The band gap's value can be determined using the following expression for absorbance.<sup>37</sup>

$$\frac{d \ln \left( \frac{A(\lambda)}{\lambda} \right)}{d \left( \frac{1}{\lambda} \right)} = \frac{m}{\left( \frac{1}{\lambda} - \frac{1}{\lambda_g} \right)} \quad (11)$$

$A(\lambda)$ ,  $\lambda$ , and  $\lambda_g$  are, respectively, absorbance, the incident wavelength, and the wavelength corresponding to the band gap energy.  $m$  and  $D$  are constants. The plot left side of eqn (11)

$$\frac{d \ln \left( \frac{A(\lambda)}{\lambda} \right)}{d \left( \frac{1}{\lambda} \right)} \text{ vs. } \frac{1}{\lambda} \text{ for } \text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{AlEr}_{0.01}\text{O}_3 \text{ and } \text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$$

$\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$  samples is shown in Fig. 8. The peak maxima can be used to determine the band gap energy, as seen in Fig. 8, at  $\left( \frac{1}{\lambda} = \frac{1}{\lambda_g} \right)$ , the peak maximum discontinuity occurs. The

optical band gap is computed as  $E_g^{\text{DASF}} = \frac{1239}{\lambda_g}$ . Using the obtained  $\lambda_g$ , the resulting values are  $(5.93 \pm 0.01)$  eV and  $(5.90 \pm 0.01)$  eV for  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{AlO}_3$  and  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$  respectively. Marotti *et al.* showed that for direct band gap semiconductors,  $dR/d\lambda$  peaks close to  $E_g$ , whereas for indirect band gap compounds, it approaches zero. Fig. 9 confirms the direct character of the optical band gap  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{AlO}_3$  and  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$ , indicating that  $dR/d\lambda$  reaches a maximum at about 5.93 eV and 5.90 eV for  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{AlO}_3$  and  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$  samples. The optical band gap values determined *via* the derivation of absorption spectrum fitting (DASF) and the first derivative of reflectance,  $dR/d\lambda$ , are the same. This supports the correctness of the band gap energy values found. The decrease in the band gap of  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{AlEr}_{0.01}\text{O}_3$  when doped with low concentration of  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  ions introduces localized energy levels within the band gap which act as both deep electron and deep hole traps within the  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{AlEr}_{0.01}\text{O}_3$

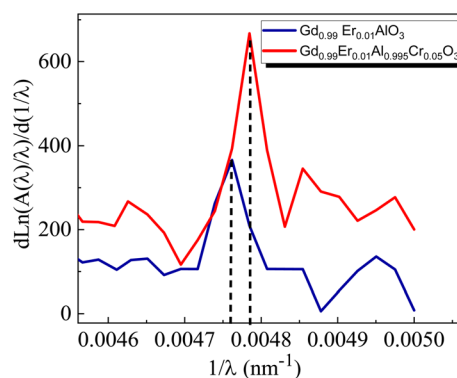


Fig. 8 The variation of  $\frac{d \ln \left( \frac{A(\lambda)}{\lambda} \right)}{d \left( \frac{1}{\lambda} \right)}$  vs.  $\frac{1}{\lambda}$  for  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{AlEr}_{0.01}\text{O}_3$  and  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$  samples.



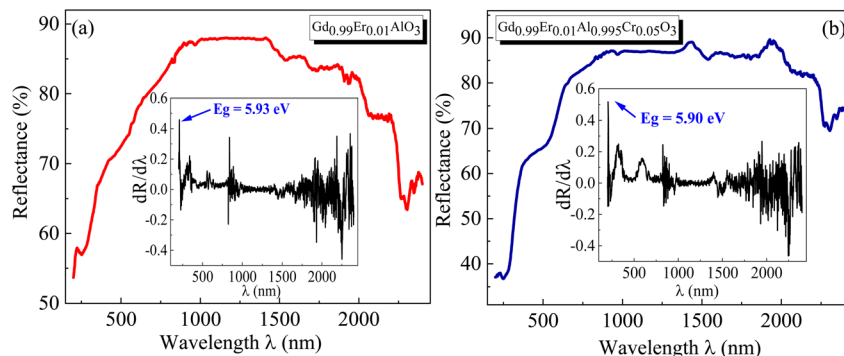


Fig. 9 The room temperature reflectance spectrum  $R(\lambda)$  of (a)  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{AlO}_3$  and (b)  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$ . The inset shows the evolution of  $dR/d\lambda$  with  $\lambda$ .

band gap. These traps are localized and do not merge with the conduction or valence bands at low doping levels. At low concentrations, these levels do not significantly alter the overall electronic structure or the positions of the conduction and valence bands.<sup>18</sup> The increased hybridization Cr–O between the Cr-3d and O-2p orbitals due to  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  incorporation modifies slightly the top of the valence band which may shift upward (due to Cr 3d–O 2p interactions) or the bottom of the conduction band may shift downward.<sup>38</sup> So, the band gap remains nearly unchanged.

**3.2.2. Photoluminescence (PL) and photoluminescence excitation (PLE) spectra.** The PL spectra of the  $\text{GdAlO}_3$  and  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{AlO}_3$  samples, excited at 377 nm with a 0.05 ms delay after flash, in the wavelength range of 400–800 nm, are presented in Fig. 10. At room temperature, the PL spectrum of undoped  $\text{GdAlO}_3$  exhibits distinct sharp red emission lines at 680 nm ( $14\,705\text{ cm}^{-1}$ ), 697 nm ( $14\,347\text{ cm}^{-1}$ ), 705 nm ( $14\,184\text{ cm}^{-1}$ ), 717 nm ( $13\,947\text{ cm}^{-1}$ ), and 758 nm ( $13\,192\text{ cm}^{-1}$ ). Upon  $\text{Er}^{3+}$  doping, these red emission lines persist, while additional bands appear in the wavelength ranges of 521–535 nm, 542–562 nm, and 655–657 nm, corresponding to the  $^2\text{H}_{11/2} \rightarrow ^4\text{I}_{15/2}$ ,  $^4\text{S}_{3/2} \rightarrow ^4\text{I}_{15/2}$  and  $^4\text{F}_{9/2} \rightarrow ^4\text{I}_{15/2}$  transitions of  $\text{Er}^{3+}$  ions, respectively.<sup>32</sup> These bands are the result of intra-configurational 4f–4f transitions of  $\text{Er}^{3+}$  ions that appear

within the 4f shell. According to the Laporte selection rule, 4f–4f transitions in rare-earth ions are parity-forbidden. The appearance of sharp spectral characteristics in  $\text{Er}^{3+}$  spectra could be explained by a non-central crystalline field's odd-order terms, which can create a coupling between odd and even states. Thus, resulting in mixed states of the 4fn with the first excited  $4f^{n-1}5d$  configuration, which mitigates Laporte's rule. This fact is responsible for the high intensity of induced electric dipole transitions observed in the PL and PLE spectra.<sup>39</sup> The red lines at 680, 697, 717, 705 and 758 nm are superimposed in both  $\text{GdAlO}_3$  and  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{AlO}_3$ , indicating that  $\text{Er}^{3+}$  doping does not modify the structure of the sharp lines and their energy locations confirms that these sharp red lines originate from the host  $\text{GdAlO}_3$  matrix. The red lines cannot originate from intraconfigurational transitions of  $\text{Gd}^{3+}$  ions since the excitation wavelength is 377 nm and the first excited state is  $^6\text{P}_{7/2}$  at 314 nm. In order for 4f–4f transitions of  $\text{Gd}^{3+}$  to take place under 377 nm excitation, two photons of 377 nm absorption must happen. Since we used a pulsed lamp with low intensity rather than a high-power laser, this is not possible. Similar sharp red emission lines under 320 nm excitation were also reported in undoped  $\text{GdAlO}_3$  by Kh. Dhahri *et al.*<sup>17</sup> Based on their findings, the red emission in  $\text{GdAlO}_3$  is attributed to the presence of oxygen vacancies, singly ionized  $\text{Vo}^+$ . In  $\text{CaGdAlO}_4$ -type layered perovskites,<sup>40</sup> deep red luminescence (emission around 711 nm) under 338 nm excitation is attributed to oxygen defects, especially oxygen interstitials. These defects create localized energy states within the bandgap, enabling radiative recombination that results in red light emission when the material is excited by UV or visible light. The origin of red luminescence in undoped  $\text{GdAlO}_3$  is primarily linked to intrinsic crystal defects, specifically oxygen-related defects, rather than the presence of intentional dopants. In addition, under 532 nm excitation, undoped  $\text{YAlO}_3$  single crystals exhibit emission bands in the wavelength range 670–800 nm, including peaks at  $\sim 688$ , 703, 715, 732, and 750 nm,<sup>41</sup> similar to those observed in  $\text{GdAlO}_3$  (ref. 17) and to the red lines found in the present work. The PLE spectrum monitored at the emission wavelength 715 nm in  $\text{YAlO}_3$  shows the strong excitation bands at  $\sim 320$  nm and 315 nm.<sup>41</sup> In the distorted perovskite structure of  $\text{GdAlO}_3$ , cation vacancies such as  $\text{Vo}^+$  and  $\text{Vo}^{++}$  are the

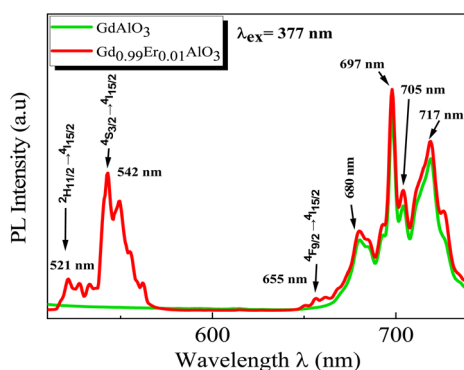


Fig. 10 Room temperature PL emission spectra of the  $\text{GdAlO}_3$  and  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{AlO}_3$  samples collected with excitation at 377 nm with flash-lamp and 0.05 ms delay after flash.



dominant intrinsic defects to neutralize the minor amount of  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  and  $\text{Er}^{3+}$ .<sup>42</sup> Taking this into account, the photoluminescence (PL) process responsible for the red emission under 377 nm excitation can be described as follows: under excitation at 377 nm, electrons are excited from the valence band and subsequently trapped by intrinsic defect. These trapped electrons then relax and are captured by deep acceptor states associated with intrinsic defects. According to the configuration coordinate model, the resulting red emission peaks can be ascribed to electron transitions between donor and acceptor levels associated with vibrational modes  $B_{3g}(4)$  and  $B_{1g}(7)$  as shown in Fig. 11. With chrome co-doping, an additional intense red emission line appears at 726 nm, and a weak peak at 693 nm, as shown in the room-temperature PL spectrum of  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$  in Fig. 12. The 726 nm emission corresponds to the  ${}^2\text{E}({}^2\text{G}) \rightarrow {}^4\text{A}_2({}^4\text{F})$  transition of  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  ions.<sup>43</sup> The co-doping by chrome induces a significant decrease in the emission intensity of the  $\text{Er}^{3+}$  ions, a dramatic decrease in the emission line intensity at 680 nm, 697 nm, 717 nm, 705 nm. A low intensity peak at 693 nm occurs assigned to the transition from the fundamental state  ${}^4\text{A}_2({}^4\text{F})$  to the sublevel of  ${}^2\text{T}_1({}^2\text{G})$  split by spin-orbit coupling. An intense emission line emerges at 726 nm Fig. 13. Photoluminescence excitation (PLE) spectra of  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$  and  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{AlO}_3$  monitored at 542 nm are presented in Fig. 14a and b, respectively. The room-temperature PLE spectrum of  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$  monitored at 542 nm, corresponding to an  $\text{Er}^{3+}$  transition, shows typical  $\text{Er}^{3+}$  excitation lines peaking at around (357 nm, 366 nm), 377 nm, 406 nm, 443 nm, 450 nm, 487 nm, and 521 nm. These lines are attributed to the following transitions:  ${}^4\text{I}_{15/2} \rightarrow {}^4\text{G}_{7/2}$ ,  ${}^4\text{I}_{15/2} \rightarrow {}^4\text{G}_{11/2}$ ,  ${}^4\text{I}_{15/2} \rightarrow {}^2\text{H}_{9/2}$ ,  ${}^4\text{I}_{15/2} \rightarrow {}^4\text{F}_{3/2}$ ,  ${}^4\text{I}_{15/2} \rightarrow {}^4\text{F}_{5/2}$ ,  ${}^4\text{I}_{15/2} \rightarrow {}^4\text{F}_{7/2}$ ,  ${}^4\text{I}_{15/2} \rightarrow {}^2\text{H}_{11/2}$ , respectively.<sup>32</sup> The intensity  $I(N, \tau)$  of the emission lines depends on both the population density  $N$  of the excited state and the radiative lifetime  $\tau$  of the emitting level. The strongest excitation peak at 377 nm, corresponding to

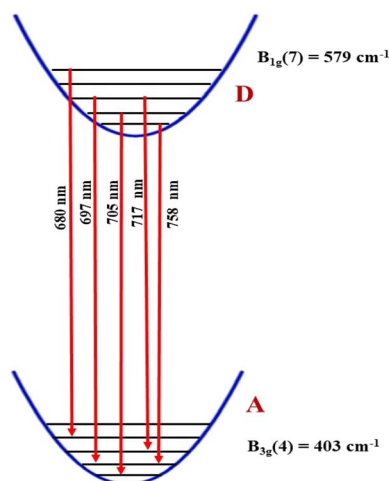


Fig. 11 Configuration coordinate diagram showing the transition responsible for red emission lines which takes place between vibrational levels at ( $T = 300$  K) in  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{AlO}_3$  and  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$ .

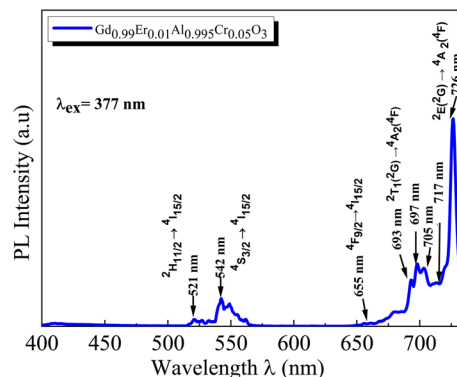


Fig. 12 Room temperature PL spectrum of  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$  in the wavelength range of 400–740 nm under 377 nm excitation.

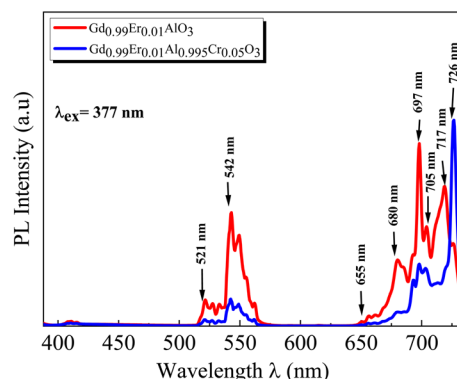


Fig. 13 Room temperature PL spectra of  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$  and  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{AlO}_3$  samples under 377 nm excitation.

the transition  ${}^4\text{I}_{15/2} \rightarrow {}^4\text{G}_{11/2}$ , can be justified by the fact that the transition  ${}^4\text{I}_{15/2} \rightarrow {}^4\text{G}_{11/2}$  obeys the selection rule for an electronic-dipole transition in the context of Judd-Oeffelt theory.<sup>39</sup>

The intensity of 4f–4f transitions of rare-earth elements within a host matrix can be described using the standard Judd-Oeffelt (J–O) theory. According to this theory, the expressions for the electric dipolar line strength  $S_{JJ'}^{\text{ED}}$  and electric dipolar oscillator strength  $f_{\text{cal}}(J, J')$  of transitions from the state  $|S, L, J\rangle$  to the state  $|S', L', J'\rangle$  are given by:<sup>39</sup>

$$S_{JJ'}^{\text{ED}} = \sum_{\lambda=2,4,6} \Omega_{\lambda} |\langle S, L, J || U^{\lambda} || S', L', J' \rangle|^2 \quad (12)$$

$$f_{\text{cal}}(JJ') = \frac{8\pi^2 mc}{3h(2J+1)\lambda} n \left( \frac{n^2+2}{3n} \right)^2 S_{JJ'}^{\text{ED}} \quad (13)$$

where  $\Omega_{\lambda}$  are the Judd-Oeffelt intensity parameters. The terms in brackets represent the doubly reduced matrix elements in intermediate coupling.  $J$  is the total angular momentum of the initial state,  $h$  is the Planck constant,  $c$  is the speed of light,  $\lambda$  is the mean wavelength corresponding to the specific absorption band of a transition  $|S, L, J\rangle$  to the state  $|S', L', J'\rangle$  and  $n$  is the refractive index of  $\text{GdAlO}_3$ . Assuming that the host matrix has minimal influence on these values, we take this value as the value of  $\text{Er}^{3+}$  in aqueous solutions (aq), or  $\text{Er}^{3+}$  in  $\text{LaF}_3$  crystal as



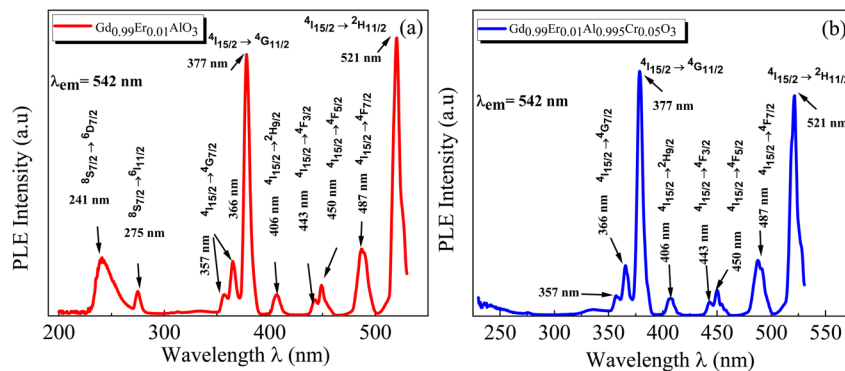


Fig. 14 Room-temperature photoluminescence excitation (PLE) spectra monitored at 542 nm of (a)  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{AlO}_3$  and (b)  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$  ( $^4\text{S}_{3/2} \rightarrow ^4\text{I}_{15/2}$ ;  $\text{Er}^{3+}$ ).

mentioned in ref. 44. The transitions from the ground state  $^4\text{I}_{15/2}$  to the excited states  $^2\text{H}_{11/2}$  and  $^4\text{G}_{11/2}$  are characterized by large reduced matrix elements of the unit tensor.<sup>32</sup> Thus, they present a high population densities of  $\text{Er}^{3+}$  ions in these excited state  $^4\text{G}_{11/2}$  and  $^2\text{H}_{11/2}$ . According to eqn (5) and (6), this may result in strong absorption exhibited in the PLE spectrum.<sup>32</sup> The existence of a significant electric dipole transition  $^4\text{I}_{15/2} \rightarrow ^4\text{G}_{11/2}$  implies that  $\text{Er}^{3+}$  ions occupy non-centrosymmetric sites in the  $\text{GdAlO}_3$  lattice. The appearance of the emission line at 542 nm ( $^4\text{S}_{3/2} \rightarrow ^4\text{I}_{15/2}$ ) transition under 377 nm excitation can be attributed to three factors: firstly, strong absorption to the  $^4\text{G}_{11/2}$  state since  $\lambda_{\text{ex}} = 377$  nm is a resonant excitation, secondly the rate of multiphonon relaxation  $^4\text{G}_{11/2} \rightarrow ^2\text{H}_{9/2} \rightarrow ^4\text{F}_{3/2} \rightarrow ^4\text{F}_{5/2} \rightarrow ^4\text{F}_{7/2} \rightarrow ^2\text{H}_{11/2} \rightarrow ^4\text{S}_{3/2}$  exceeds the probability of radiative decay transitions to the ground state  $^4\text{I}_{15/2}$ ; finally, the high energy separation between the emitted level  $^4\text{S}_{3/2}$  and  $^4\text{F}_{9/2}$  level. However, the high intensity of the emission line at 542 nm under 521 nm excitation ( $^4\text{I}_{15/2} \rightarrow ^2\text{H}_{11/2}$ ) can be attributed to the large reduced matrix elements of the unit tensor of this transition, leading to high cross-absorption to the  $^2\text{H}_{11/2}$  state. Moreover, the lowest energy separation (approximately  $1000\text{ cm}^{-1}$ ) between the emitted level  $^4\text{S}_{3/2}$  and  $^2\text{H}_{11/2}$  levels increases the multiphonon relaxation. Hence, the multiphonon relaxation from  $^2\text{H}_{11/2}$  to  $^4\text{S}_{3/2}$  level is efficient, which induces the population of  $^4\text{S}_{3/2}$  level. The increase of the intensity of the 542 nm emission line ( $^4\text{S}_{3/2} \rightarrow ^4\text{I}_{15/2}$ ) with decreasing wavelength excitation from 406 nm to 487 nm can be explained by the multi-phonon relaxation between the excited level and the emitting level  $^4\text{S}_{3/2}$ , which is governed by the energy-gap law or phonon law.<sup>45</sup> The multi-phonon relaxation rate ( $W_{\text{nr}}$ ) increases with decreasing energy separation between the excited levels and the emitting level  $^4\text{S}_{3/2}$ . Hence, the emission at 542 nm increases with decreasing wavelength excitation from 406 nm ( $^4\text{I}_{15/2} \rightarrow ^2\text{H}_{9/2}$ ) to 487 nm ( $^4\text{I}_{15/2} \rightarrow ^4\text{F}_{7/2}$ ). The energy separation between the  $^4\text{S}_{3/2}$  and  $^4\text{F}_{9/2}$  levels is approximately  $3100\text{ cm}^{-1}$ ,<sup>32</sup> requiring five phonons ( $579\text{ cm}^{-1}$  each) to bridge the gap. Therefore, the non-radiative relaxation from  $^4\text{S}_{3/2}$  to  $^4\text{F}_{9/2}$  highly inefficient. As a result, the red emission intensity at 655 nm is lower than the green emission intensity at 542 nm under 377 nm excitation in  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{AlO}_3$  (Fig. 10). The

Photoluminescence process at 542 nm under 377 nm excitation in  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{AlO}_3$  is shown in Fig. 15.

The room-temperature PLE spectrum of  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{AlO}_3$  monitored at 542 nm, shows the same characteristic excitation lines as those observed in  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$  with two additional bands at 241 nm and 275 nm. These bands are attributed to the  $^8\text{S}_{7/2} \rightarrow ^6\text{D}_{7/2}$  and  $^8\text{S}_{7/2} \rightarrow ^6\text{I}_{7/2}$  transitions of  $\text{Gd}^{3+}$  ions, respectively.<sup>46</sup> The disappearance of these emission bands in the Cr-doped sample ( $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$ ), under 542 nm monitoring, suggests the absence of energy transfer from  $\text{Gd}^{3+}$  to  $\text{Er}^{3+}$  in the presence of  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$ . The room-temperature PLE spectrum of  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{AlO}_3$  and  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$  monitored at 697 nm are shown in (Fig. 16). The spectrum of  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{AlO}_3$  exhibits two intense peaks at 322 nm and 275 nm, which assigned to the excitation of the electron from the valence band which trapped by the defect within the forbidden bandgap and the  $^8\text{S}_{7/2} \rightarrow ^6\text{I}_{7/2}$  transitions of  $\text{Gd}^{3+}$  ions, respectively. In contrast, the photoluminescence spectrum of  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$  monitored at 697 nm reveals intense peaks at 329 nm and 276 nm, assigned to the excitation of the electron

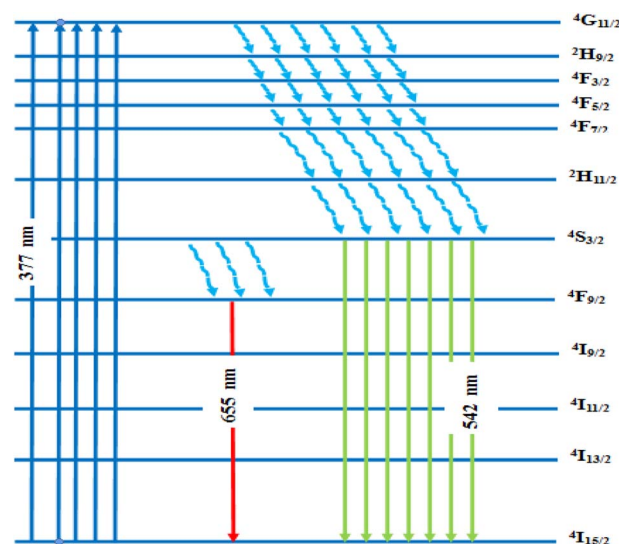


Fig. 15 The Photoluminescence process at 542 nm under 377 nm in  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{AlO}_3$  and  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$ .

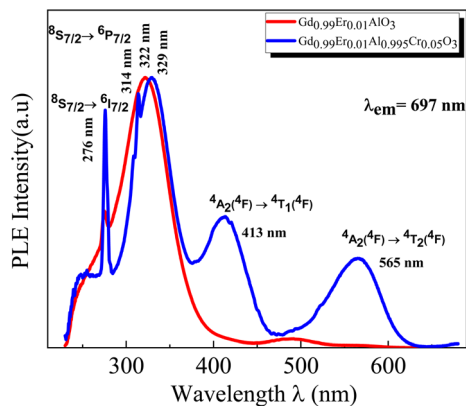


Fig. 16 Room temperature PLE spectra in  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{AlO}_3$  and  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$  monitored at 697 nm.

from the valence band which trapped by the defect and the  $^8\text{S}_{7/2} \rightarrow ^6\text{I}_{7/2}$  transitions of  $\text{Gd}^{3+}$  ions, respectively. Additionally, four extra bands are observed at 565 nm, 413 nm, 314 nm, and 241 nm. The broad bands around 565 nm and 413 nm are assigned to transitions from the ground state  $^4\text{A}_2(^4\text{F})$  to the excited states  $^4\text{T}_2(^4\text{F})$  and  $^4\text{T}_1(^4\text{F})$  of  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$ .<sup>47</sup> The peaks at 314 nm and 241 nm are assigned to the  $(^8\text{S}_{7/2} \rightarrow ^6\text{P}_{7/2}; \text{Gd}^{3+})$  and  $(^8\text{S}_{7/2} \rightarrow ^6\text{D}_{7/2}; \text{Gd}^{3+})$  transitions, respectively.<sup>46</sup>

**3.2.3. Crystal field analysis and energy level schemes of  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  ions in  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$  nanoparticles.** The energy levels of  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  ions in  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$  nanoparticles were calculated using the total Hamiltonian<sup>48</sup>

$$H = H_0 + H_{ee}(B, C) + H_{\text{Trees}}(\alpha) + H_{\text{CF}}(D_q) + H_{\text{SO}}(\xi) \quad (14)$$

Eqn (14) describes the entire Hamiltonian  $H$ , where  $H_0$  is the configuration Hamiltonian term, and  $H_{ee}(B, C)$ , representing the electron–electron repulsion Hamiltonian. This term gives rise to the eight Russell–Saunders terms  $^{2S+1}\text{L}$ , including  $^4\text{F}$ ,  $^4\text{P}$ ,  $^2\text{G}$ ,  $^2\text{P}$ ,  $^2\text{H}$ ,  $^2\text{F}$ ,  $(^2\text{aD})$  and  $(^2\text{bD})$  for  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  ions with  $3\text{d}^3$  configuration.  $H_{\text{CF}}(D_q)$  is the crystal field Hamiltonian, and  $H_{\text{SO}}(\xi)$  represents the spin–orbit coupling Hamiltonian. Using Racah algebraic techniques, the energy levels of the Russell–Saunders terms for the  $3\text{d}^3$  configuration are expressed in terms of Racah parameters  $A$ ,  $B$ , and  $C$ , which depend on the double radial integrals  $F$  and  $G$ . The relative energies are those measured by optical spectroscopy. The quantity related to the  $A$  parameter is eliminated since it is the same for all the Russell–Saunders terms.  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  ions ( $3\text{d}^3$ ) are assumed to substitute  $\text{Al}^{3+}$  ions at the octahedral  $[\text{AlO}_6]$  site in an intermediate crystal field (CF) strength. The basic function in the LS coupling scheme are expressed as:<sup>49,50</sup>

$$|\psi\rangle = |\alpha, \text{SM}_s, \text{LM}\rangle \quad (15)$$

The crystal field energy levels can then be obtained by diagonalizing the entire Hamiltonian  $H = H_0 + H_{ee}(B, C) + H_{\text{CF}}(D_q) + H_{\text{SO}}(\xi)$ . The crystal field Hamiltonian ( $H_{\text{CF}}$ ) in Wybourne notation is the spin–orbit hamiltonian and the Trees hamiltonian are expressed as follow:

$$H_{\text{CF}} = \sum_{k,q} B_q^k C_q^k = 21D_q \left[ C_0^{(4)} + \sqrt{\frac{5}{14}} (C_0^{(4)} + C_{-4}^{(4)}) \right] \quad (16)$$

$$H_{\text{SO}} = \sum_{i=1}^N \zeta(r_i) l_i S_i \quad (17)$$

$$H_{\text{Trees}} = \alpha L(L+1) \quad (18)$$

where  $\xi_{3d}$  is the spin–orbit coupling constant,  $\alpha$  is the Trees parameter. The Racah and crystal field parameters  $B$ ,  $C$ , and  $D_q$  are determined using the Newton–Raphson method by fitting the experimental energies levels to the theoretical ones  $^4\text{A}_2(^4\text{F}) \rightarrow ^4\text{T}_2(^4\text{F})$  (565 nm),  $^4\text{A}_2(^4\text{F}) \rightarrow ^4\text{T}_1(^4\text{F})$  (413 nm), and  $^2\text{E}(^2\text{G}) \rightarrow ^4\text{A}_2(^4\text{F})$  (726 nm). The adjusted spin–orbit coupling  $\xi_{3d}$  and Trees parameter  $\alpha$  are calculated as follows:

$$\xi_{3d} = \frac{1}{2} \left( \sqrt{\frac{B}{B_0}} + \sqrt{\frac{C}{C_0}} \right) \xi_0 \quad (19)$$

$$\alpha = N^4 \alpha_0 \quad \text{where} \quad N^2 = \frac{1}{2} \left( \sqrt{\frac{B}{B_0}} + \sqrt{\frac{C}{C_0}} \right) \quad (20)$$

$B_0 = 918\text{ cm}^{-1}$ ,  $C_0 = 4133\text{ cm}^{-1}$ ,<sup>48</sup>  $\xi_0 = 275\text{ cm}^{-1}$  and  $\alpha_0 = 30\text{ cm}^{-1}$ ,<sup>48</sup> which refer to the free ion parameters of  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$ . The matrix elements of the crystal field, spin–orbit, and Trees Hamiltonians in the basics are provided by Y. Y. Yeung and C. Rudowicz.<sup>50</sup> The full Hamiltonian matrix  $H$  (as defined in eqn (14)) was diagonalized to derive the energy levels as a function of the Racah parameters  $B$  and  $C$ , the crystal field parameter  $D_q$ , and the spin–orbit coupling constant. This diagonalization was performed using unique code developed in our lab with the Maple program. The theoretical computed values are  $B = 635\text{ cm}^{-1}$ ,  $C = 3008\text{ cm}^{-1}$  and  $D_q = 1776\text{ cm}^{-1}$  with  $(D_q/B = 2.79)$ . The calculated parameters were used to calculate the energy levels at room temperature, as listed in Table 2. The Tanabe–Sugano diagram for  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  ions in octahedral site symmetry, shown for the ratio  $C/B = 4.73$  in Fig. 17, illustrates the overall behavior of  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  energy levels in terms of  $D_q/B$  relative to the local field intensity. The vertical line corresponds to the calculated  $D_q/B$  value from our theoretical computation of  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  levels in  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$ . It is well known that when  $D_q/B < 2.3$ ,  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  ions experience a weak crystal field, resulting in broad-band emission. However, when  $D_q/B > 2.3$ , the ions exhibit strong and narrow peak emission through the  $^2\text{E}(^2\text{G}) \rightarrow ^4\text{A}_2(^4\text{F})$  transitions.<sup>51</sup> In our case, the calculated  $D_q/B = 2.9$ , confirms that the energy of the  $^2\text{E}$  state is the lowest excited energy level. These results demonstrate that  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  ions experience a strong crystal field, exhibiting sharp  $^2\text{E}(^2\text{G}) \rightarrow ^4\text{A}_2(^4\text{F})$  emission at 726 nm.

**3.2.4. Energy transfer process from  $\text{Gd}^{3+}$ ,  $\text{Er}^{3+}$  and oxygen defects to  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  ions in  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$ .** The lack of  $\text{Gd}^{3+}$  transitions in the PLE spectrum of the  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$  sample monitored at 542 nm proves the weak efficiency of energy transfer between  $\text{Gd}^{3+}$  and  $\text{Er}^{3+}$  ions. This can be



$O_h$	$E_{\text{obs}}$	$E_{\text{cal}}^*$ [this work]	$E_{\text{cal}}^{a*}$ [this work]
${}^4\text{A}_{2g}({}^4\text{F})$	0	0	0
${}^2\text{E}_g({}^2\text{G})$	13 774	13 772	13 902 (4)
${}^2\text{T}_{1g}({}^2\text{G})$		14 312	14 434 (4)
			14 493 (2)
${}^4\text{T}_{2g}({}^4\text{F})$	17 760	17 760	17 666 (2)
			17 722 (4)
			17 832 (2)
			17 836 (4)
${}^2\text{T}_{2g}({}^2\text{G})$	—	20 906	20 974 (4)
			21 083 (2)
${}^4\text{T}_{1g}({}^4\text{F})$		24 276	24 165 (4)
			24 173 (2)
			24 185 (4)
			24 187(2)
${}^2\text{A}_{1g}({}^2\text{G})$	—	29 324	29 507 (2)
${}^2\text{T}_{1g}({}^2\text{P})$	—	31 382	31 582 (2)
			31 629 (4)
${}^2\text{T}_{1g}({}^2\text{H})$	—	31 712	31 803 (2)
			31 978 (4)
${}^2\text{E}_g({}^2\text{H})$	—	33 325	33 458 (2)
${}^2\text{T}_{1g}({}^2\text{H})$	—	36 266	36 324 (2)
			36 360 (4)
${}^4\text{T}_{1g}({}^4\text{P})$	—	38 528	38 388 (2)
			38 403 (4)
			38 503 (4)
			38 535 (2)
${}^2\text{T}_{2g}({}^2\text{H})$	—	40 671	40 574 (2)
			40 674(4)
${}^2\text{A}_{2g}({}^2\text{F})$	—	42 024	42 033 (2)
${}^2\text{T}_{2g}({}^2_{\text{a}}\text{D})$	—	49 088	49 341 (2)
			49 451 (4)
${}^2\text{T}_{2g}({}^2\text{F})$	—	50 505	50 543 (2)
			50 652 (4)
${}^2\text{E}_g({}^2_{\text{a}}\text{D})$	—	50 661	50 662(4)
${}^2\text{T}_{1g}({}^2\text{F})$	—	55 225	55 122 (2)
			55 246 (4)
${}^2\text{T}_{2g}({}^2_{\text{b}}\text{D})$	—	69 140	69 008 (4)
			69 204(2)
${}^2\text{E}_g({}^2_{\text{b}}\text{D})$	—	72 823	72 879 (4)

The decay PL curves at 697 nm and 542 nm under 377 nm excitation are shown in Fig. 18 (a) and (b) for  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{AlO}_3$  and in Fig. 18 (c) and (d), for  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$ . The decay PL curves at 542 nm under  $\lambda_{\text{ex}} = 377$  nm in  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{-AlO}_3$  is fitted to a monoexponential equation  $I(t) = A\exp(-t/\tau)$  with fluorescence lifetimes  $\tau_{\text{Er}} = \frac{1}{K_r + K_{\text{nr}}} = 0.13$  ms. The decay of the emission at 542 nm under 377 nm excitation in  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$  is bi-exponential with lifetimes  $\tau' = 0.13$  ms and  $\tau'' = \tau_{\text{Er,Cr}} = \frac{1}{K_r + K_{\text{nr}} + K_{\text{T}}} = 0.03$  ms.  $K_r$  is the emissive rate constant,  $K_{\text{nr}}$  is the non-radiative rate and  $K_{\text{T}}$  is the transfer rate constant. The decay curve shows two lifetimes: an unchanged longer time 0.13 ms (no transfer), a shorter time 0.03 ms (efficient transfer) which indicates an efficient energy transfer from a part of  $\text{Er}^{3+}$  ions to  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  is taken place. The decay rate of  $\text{Er}^{3+}$  emission in  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{AlO}_3$  and  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{-Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$  samples as well as the ET efficiency from  $\text{Er}^{3+}$  to  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  can be calculated using eqn (21)–(23),

$$K_r + K_{\text{pr}} = (\tau_{\text{Fr}})^{-1} \quad (21)$$

$$K_r + K_{\text{pr}} + K_T = (\tau_{\text{FrCr}})^{-1} \quad (22)$$

$$\eta_{\text{ET}} = \frac{K_{\text{T}}}{K_{\text{r}} + K_{\text{nr}} + K_{\text{T}}} \quad (23)$$

$\tau_{\text{Er}}$  and  $\tau_{\text{Er,Cr}}$  are the life times of the  $\text{Er}^{3+}:^4\text{S}_{3/2}$  level in  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{AlO}_3$  and  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$  respectively. The ET efficiency ( $\eta_{\text{ET}}$ ) from  $\text{Er}^{3+}:^4\text{S}_{3/2}$  to the  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$ : as indicated from the energy level diagram in Fig. 19 can be estimated to be 76%. Which indicate highly efficient energy transfer from  $\text{Er}^{3+}:^4\text{S}_{3/2}$  to the  $\text{Cr}^{3+}:^4\text{T}_{2g}(\text{F})$ . In rare-earth ion systems, energy transfer



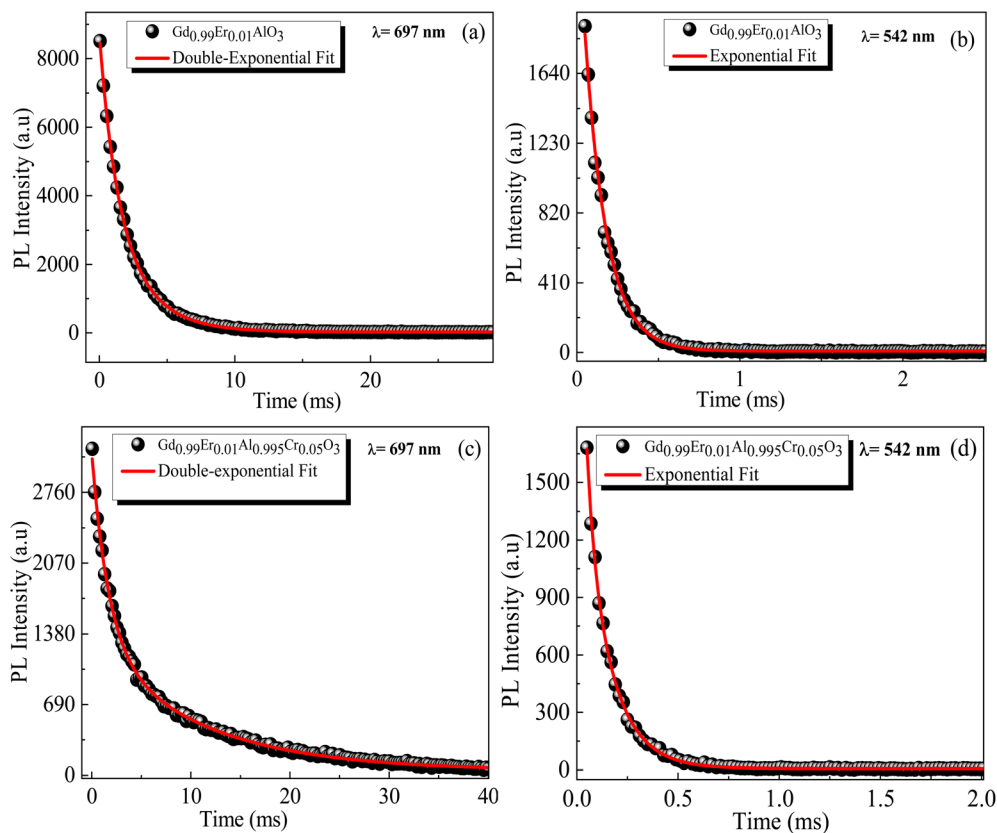


Fig. 18 Decay PL curves under 377 nm excitation for  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{AlO}_3$  at (a) 697 nm and (b) 542 nm, and for  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$  at (c) 697 nm and (d) 542 nm.

exchange interactions are generally negligible due to the small spatial extent of 4f orbitals, making multipolar mechanisms dominant. Specifically, in  $\text{GdAlO}_3$ , efficient trapping of

excitation energy by  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  and rare earth ions like  $\text{Er}^{3+}$  is attributed to multipolar interactions when there is spectral overlap, while exchange interactions play a minor role and are only

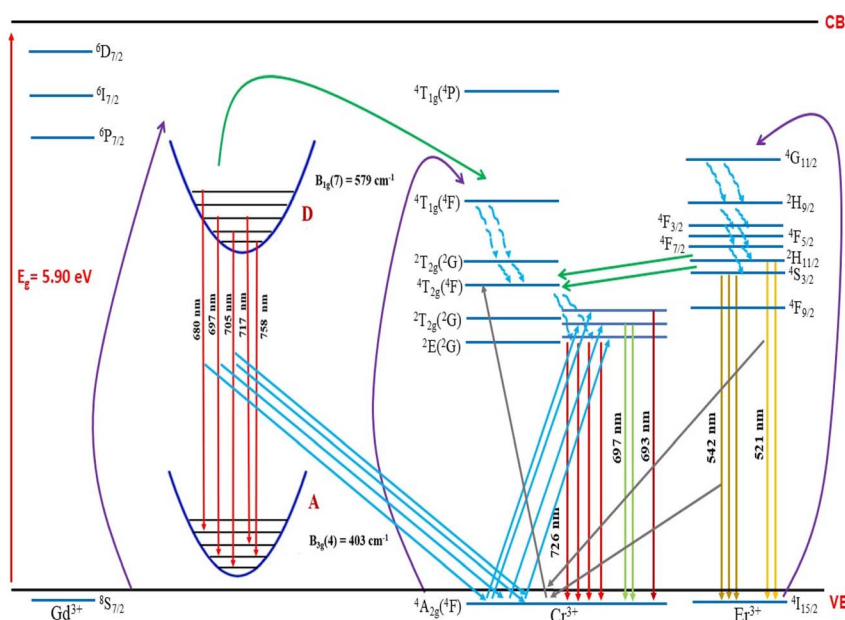


Fig. 19 Energy level diagram and energy transfer mechanism in  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$ .



**Table 3** Fluorescence lifetime of  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{AlO}_3$  and  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$  samples, monitored at  $\text{Er}^{3+}$  emission wavelengths of  $\lambda_{\text{em}} = 542$  nm and  $\lambda_{\text{em}} = 697$  nm under  $\lambda_{\text{ex}} = 377$  nm

Samples	$\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{AlO}_3$		$\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$	
	697 nm	542 nm	697 nm	542 nm
The recorded wavelength	Double-exponential	Mono-exponential	Double-exponential	Double-exponential
$\tau_r(\text{ms}) = \frac{1}{K_r + K_{nr}}$	2.61–1.18	0.13	—	—
$\tau(\text{ms}) = \frac{1}{K_r + K_{nr} + K_T}$	—	—	1.69–10.77	0.13–0.03

significant for rare earth ions lacking allowed absorption bands.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, for  $\text{Er}^{3+}$ – $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  pairs in  $\text{GdAlO}_3$ , multipolar interactions are expected to dominate the energy transfer process, provided there is suitable spectral overlap between their energy levels. The non-radiative energy transfer in  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$  is taken place through the following cross-relaxations: ( $^2\text{H}_{11/2} + ^4\text{A}_2(^4\text{F}) \rightarrow ^4\text{I}_{15/2} + ^4\text{T}_2(^4\text{F})$ ), ( $^4\text{S}_{3/2} + ^4\text{A}_2(^4\text{F}) \rightarrow ^4\text{I}_{15/2} + ^4\text{T}_2(^4\text{F})$ ) transitions and *via* resonant phonon-assisted energy transfer (Fig. 19). This energy transfer process involving  $\text{Er}^{3+}$  ions explain the strong luminescence quenching of the emission bands at 542 nm, 521 nm and the appearance of an intense emission line at 726 nm when  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  is incorporated. The decay of the emission at 697 nm under 377 nm excitation in  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{AlO}_3$  is bi-exponential with lifetimes  $\tau' = 2.61$  ms. and  $\tau'' = 1.18$  ms. Biexponential decay indicates that there are two different mechanisms that affect the decay dynamics and energy transfer may be one of these mechanisms. The decay curve shows two lifetimes: a longer time 2.61 ms (no transfer), a shorter time 1.18 (efficient transfer). This fact indicates that there is energy transfer from intrinsic defects to  $\text{Er}^{3+}$  ions in  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{AlO}_3$ . However, the decay curve at 697 nm under 377 nm excitation in  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$  is described by a double-exponential equation  $I(t) = I_{01} \exp(-t/\tau_1) + I_{02} \exp(-t/\tau_2)$ , where  $I$  is the luminescence intensity;  $I_{01} = 1844$  and  $I_{02} = 1258$  are constants;  $t$  represents time,  $\tau_1 = 1.69$  ms and  $\tau_2 = 10.77$  ms are decay times for the respective exponential components. The absence of the bands at 565 nm and 413 nm in the PLE spectrum of  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{AlO}_3$  monitored at 697 nm indicates that the 697 nm emission line arise not only from electron transition between intrinsic defects centers, but also from the transition  $^2\text{T}_1(^2\text{G}) \rightarrow ^4\text{A}_2(^4\text{F})$  of  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$ . This assignment is justified since the experimental value 697 nm ( $14\,347\text{ cm}^{-1}$ ) is well reproduced by theoretical value of the transition in Table 2. Moreover, the highest-value lifetime  $\tau_2 = 10.77$  ms is characteristic of the spin-forbidden transition.  $\tau_1 = 1.69$  ms is fluorescence lifetime of 697 nm emission coming from the electron transition between two defects centers. The co-doping with chromium leads to a reduction of fluorescence lifetime of 697 nm emission from 2.61 ms to 1.69 ms, indicating that there is an increase in the transfer rate  $K_T$  constant. A dramatic decrease in the 697 nm emission line intensity and the appearance of an intense emission line at 726 nm support the energy transfer from oxygen-vacancies to  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  ions *via* resonant phonon-assisted energy transfer from oxygen defect to

$\text{Cr}^{3+} : ^4\text{T}_2(^4\text{F})$  level and cross-relaxation processes (Fig. 19). The value of the constants  $I_{01}$  and  $\tau_1$  in the PL decay at 697 nm under 377 nm excitation in  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$  indicate that a very low part  $I_{01} \exp(-t/\tau_1)$  of the emission at 697 nm is originating from electron transition between two intrinsic defects centers coupled to the  $\text{B}_{3g}(4)$  and  $\text{B}_{1g}(7)$  vibrational modes. The highest part  $I_{02} \exp(-t/\tau_2)$  of the emission at 697 nm in  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$  is originating from the transition  $^2\text{T}_1(^2\text{G}) \rightarrow ^4\text{A}_2(^4\text{F})$  of  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$ . The energy transfer from  $\text{Er}^{3+}$ , defects centers to  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  and the high multiphonon relaxation from  $^2\text{T}_1(^2\text{G})$  to the  $^2\text{E}(^2\text{G})$  level, induces the intense line at 726 nm through the transition  $^2\text{E}(^2\text{G}) \rightarrow ^4\text{A}_2(^4\text{F})$  of  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  (Fig. 19). Based on the experimental results and the theoretical optical considerations, the energy transfer process between  $\text{Er}^{3+}$ ,  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  and oxygen-vacancies under  $\lambda_{\text{ex}} = 377$  nm is presented in Fig. 19 and (Table 3).

## 4. Conclusion

$\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{AlO}_3$  and  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$  samples were successfully synthesized using the solid-state reaction method. XRD analysis confirmed that both samples crystallize in an orthorhombic structure with a  $Pbnm$  space group. Using the Derivation of absorption spectrum fitting (DASF) and the first derivative of reflectance  $dR/d\lambda$  methods, the optical band gaps were determined to be 5.93 eV and 5.90 eV, respectively. Red emission peaks at 680, 697, 705, 717, and 758 nm were observed in both samples and are ascribed transition involving intrinsic defects coupled with the  $\text{B}_{3g}(4)$  and  $\text{B}_{1g}(7)$  vibrational modes. Co-doping with  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  induced a significant decrease in  $\text{Er}^{3+}$  emission intensity, particularly the intensity of red lines at 680, 697, 705, 717 nm. The weak peak at 693 nm and the intense peak at 726 nm are assigned to the  $^2\text{T}_1(^2\text{G}) \rightarrow ^4\text{A}_2(^4\text{F})$  and  $^2\text{E}_g(^2\text{G}) \rightarrow ^4\text{A}_{2g}(^4\text{F})$  transitions of  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$ . PL spectra and decay curves at 697 nm and 542 nm under 377 nm excitation confirmed efficient non-radiative energy transfer from  $\text{Er}^{3+}$  and intrinsic defects to  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  ions. The energy transfer occurs *via* resonant phonon-assisted processes from the  $\text{Er}^{3+} : ^2\text{H}_{11/2}$  and  $^4\text{S}_{3/2}$  levels to the  $\text{Cr}^{3+} : ^4\text{T}_2(^4\text{F})$  level, followed by cross-relaxations ( $^2\text{H}_{11/2} + ^4\text{A}_2(^4\text{F}) \rightarrow ^4\text{I}_{15/2} + ^4\text{T}_2(^4\text{F})$ ), ( $^4\text{S}_{3/2} + ^4\text{A}_2(^4\text{F}) \rightarrow ^4\text{I}_{15/2} + ^4\text{T}_2(^4\text{F})$ ). Decay curves at 697 nm indicate that the lower part of this emission originates from transition involving intrinsic defects coupled with vibrational modes, while the highest part of the emission at 697 nm in  $\text{Gd}_{0.99}\text{Er}_{0.01}\text{Al}_{0.995}\text{Cr}_{0.005}\text{O}_3$  is due to the



$\text{Cr}^{3+} {}^2\text{T}_1 ({}^2\text{G}) \rightarrow {}^4\text{A}_2 ({}^4\text{F})$  transition. Finally, energy transfer from  $\text{Er}^{3+}$ , defect to  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$  and the high relaxation from  ${}^2\text{T}_1 ({}^2\text{G})$  to the  ${}^2\text{E} ({}^2\text{G})$  level induce the intense line at 726 nm due to the transition  ${}^2\text{E} ({}^2\text{G}) \rightarrow {}^4\text{A}_2 ({}^4\text{F})$  of  $\text{Cr}^{3+}$ .

## Author contributions

F. Mselmi: Conceptualization, methodology, writing – original draft, formal analysis. Abir Hadded: Writing – original draft, formal analysis, software. Hajer Souissi: Investigation, validation. Souha Kammoun: Investigation, validation, supervision. J. Pina: Software, investigation. B. F. O. Costa: Investigation, validation, supervision.

## Conflicts of interest

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

## Data availability

All the data for the manuscript is available in the manuscript.

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