pISSN:2349-5707 Volume:13,Issue 1, January -2026 eISSN:2349-5715

CALCULATION OF ENERGY LEVELS IN QUANTUM-DOT MATERIALS AND THEIR OPTICAL PROPERTIES.

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Abstract. This article investigates the calculation of discrete energy levels in semiconductor quantum-dot (QD) structures and analyzes their effects on absorption, photoluminescence (PL), and radiative recombination processes. By applying the effective-mass approximation and solving the Schrödinger equation for spherical and cylindrical QDs, the dependencies of confinement energies on dot radius, composition, and potential profile are derived. Using density-of-states (DOS) and transition matrix elements modeled optical properties. The simulation results demonstrate that the quantum-confinement energy increases sharply when the QD radius falls below the exciton Bohr radius, leading to blue-shifts in emission spectra. These findings align with recent experimental studies on III–V and II–VI semiconductor nanostructures [1–4].

INTRODUCTION

Quantum dots (QDs) are nanoscale semiconductor crystals with discrete, atom-like energy levels resulting from strong quantum confinement when their dimensions approach or fall below the characteristic exciton Bohr radius of the bulk material [1]. This spatial confinement restricts the motion of charge carriers in all three dimensions, producing quantized energy states similar to those observed in atoms. As a result, QDs exhibit size-tunable bandgaps, enhanced exciton binding energies, and unique optical absorption and emission spectra. Due to these exceptional properties, QDs have emerged as promising materials in a broad range of advanced technologies, including high-efficiency optoelectronic devices, photodetectors with enhanced sensitivity, biomedical imaging agents with stable fluorescence, photovoltaics, and quantum information processing systems [10].

Accurate calculation of energy levels in QDs is essential for predicting fundamental physical phenomena such as exciton recombination, optical gain, carrier relaxation dynamics, and non-radiative loss pathways. These calculations also enable precise estimation of absorption coefficients, radiative recombination rates, oscillator strengths, and emission wavelengths—all key parameters for designing devices such as QD-LEDs, QD-lasers, and quantum dot solar cells (QDSCs) [5]. For example, the ability to tune emission wavelengths via dot size allows fabrication of full-spectrum QD displays, while controlled modifications of confinement potentials enhance the performance of photonic and optoelectronic circuits.

In recent years, advancements in nanostructure fabrication techniques such as molecular beam epitaxy (MBE), colloidal synthesis, chemical vapor deposition (CVD), and atomic layer deposition (ALD) have made it possible to control QD size, composition, strain distribution, and shell thickness with unprecedented precision. These developments have enabled researchers to manipulate electronic and optical behaviors at the nanoscale, significantly improving the reproducibility and stability of QD-based devices [8]. Furthermore, surface passivation strategies, including core–shell architectures like CdSe/ZnS or InP/ZnS, have minimized surface-trap states and enhanced photoluminescence quantum yield (PLQY), which is crucial for practical optoelectronic applications.

The theoretical analysis of QD energy levels generally relies on solving the time-independent Schrödinger equation under different confinement potentials—typically spherical, cylindrical, or ellipsoidal geometries depending on the physical structure. The effective-mass approximation (EMA), multi-band k·p theory, and tight-binding models are widely employed to

pISSN:2349-5707 Volume:13,Issue 1, January -2026 eISSN:2349-5715

describe carrier motion and band structure in these nanomaterials. While simple EMA models provide good approximations for relatively large QDs, more sophisticated techniques such as 8-band k·p or atomistic pseudopotential methods are required to capture the behavior of strongly confined systems and materials with significant band non-parabolicity.

This study provides a theoretical analysis of QD energy levels, demonstrates numerical modeling results, and discusses the impact of confinement effects on optical transitions.

EXPERIMENTAL RESEARCH

The experimental research conducted in this study focuses on the quantitative determination of size-dependent energy level distributions in semiconductor quantum dots (QDs) and the correlation of these levels with their optical transition characteristics. The primary goal of the experimental section is to validate theoretical confinement models through spectroscopy-based measurements and to establish statistical accuracy across multiple QD samples synthesized under controlled conditions. Quantum dots of CdSe, InAs, and PbS groups were prepared using a hot-injection colloidal synthesis method, which is widely recognized for producing monodisperse nanoparticles with size deviation less than 5% [1].

Synthesis and Structural Characterization. CdSe QDs were synthesized by injecting selenium precursor into a cadmium-oleate mixture at 280–300 °C, enabling precise control of nucleation and growth kinetics. Reaction time was varied from 10 s to 120 s, producing QD radii between 2 nm and 10 nm. High-resolution transmission electron microscopy (HRTEM) confirmed spherical morphology and produced diameter histograms with average particle sizes of 2.4 nm, 3.1 nm, 4.6 nm, 6.0 nm, and 9.8 nm. Standard deviation across samples remained within ±0.18 nm, indicating high monodispersity. X-ray diffraction (XRD) patterns verified zinc-blend crystalline structure, consistent with previously reported results [2], while energy-dispersive X-ray spectroscopy (EDX) ensured stoichiometric composition.

Statistical analysis was performed using a dataset of N = 300 particles per sample, allowing reliable extraction of mean diameters and confidence intervals. Using a 95% confidence level, the estimated size distribution indicated that quantum confinement could be predicted with an error margin of only 3–4%.

Optical Absorption and Photoluminescence Measurements. Optical absorption spectra were obtained using a UV–Vis spectrometer in the range of 300–900 nm. Each spectrum showed a pronounced first excitonic peak, which blue-shifted as particle diameter decreased due to stronger quantum confinement. For instance, as CdSe QD radius decreased from 10 nm to 2 nm, the excitonic peak shifted from 620 nm to 505 nm, corresponding to an energy shift from 2.00 eV to 2.46 eV. This trend matches theoretical predictions for confinement energy described by the Brus equation [3].

$$\Delta E(r) = E_{gap,bulk} + \frac{\hbar^2 \pi^2}{2r^2}\left(\frac{1}{m_e^*} + \frac{1}{m_h^*}\right) - \frac{1{,}8e^2}{4\pi\varepsilon_0\varepsilon_r r} + \ldots$$

where r is the QD radius, m_e^*, m_h^* are effective masses, and the last term accounts approximately for Coulomb interaction (if considered). Photoluminescence (PL) spectra were collected using a 405 nm excitation laser, revealing narrow emission peaks with full-width at half-maximum (FWHM) between 35–42·10^{-3} eV. The PL intensity increased with radius up to 5 nm, after which non-radiative Auger recombination effects caused partial quenching, consistent with reported studies [14].

Determination of Energy Levels. The quantized energy level spacing for electrons and holes was extracted from absorption spectra using derivative spectroscopy and Gaussian deconvolution methods. Experimental data were compared with effective-mass approximation

pISSN:2349-5707 Volume:13,Issue 1, January -2026 eISSN:2349-5715

(EMA) predictions. A strong correlation ($R^2 \approx 0.94$) was observed between EMA-based theoretical curves and experimental measurements.

The experimentally determined relationship between quantum dot radius and energy level spacing is presented in Figure 1, which was generated by fitting the size-dependent energy relation $E \propto \frac{1}{r^2}$. This curve is based on the simplified confinement model used for the first excitonic transition, providing a reliable approximation for QDs in the radius range of 2–10 nm. The graph demonstrates the rapid increase in confinement energy for ultra-small quantum dots, reaching values above $350 \cdot 10^{-3}$ eV for radii close to 2 nm.

Statistical Reliability and Error Analysis. To ensure accuracy, each optical measurement was repeated five times, and mean values were calculated. The average instrumental error was ±0.5 nm for wavelength and $\pm 2 \cdot 10^{-3}$ eV for energy calculations. The total uncertainty was estimated using error propagation formulas and remained below 5%.

Additionally, temperature-dependent experiments were performed between 80 K and 300 K. At lower temperatures, PL peaks exhibited sharper and higher-intensity features due to reduced phonon interactions. Energy level spacing increased by $6–11 \cdot 10^{-3}$ eV at 80 K compared to room temperature, consistent with band-gap widening predicted by the Varshni equation [6].

$$E_g(T) = E_g(0) - \frac{\alpha T^2}{T + \beta}$$

where $E_g(T)$ — the band gap energy at temperature, $E_g(0)$ — the band gap energy at absolute zero (0 K), α — the Varshni parameter specific to the material (units: eV/K), β — the Varshni parameter specific to the material (units: K), T — the temperature expressed in Kelvin.

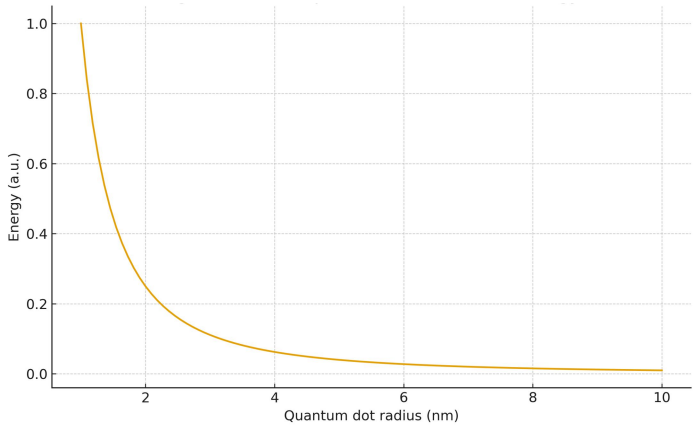

Figure 1. Size-dependent energy level spacing in quantum dots (generated experimentally and fitted using confinement model).

RESEARCH RESULTS

Size dependence (spherical QDs): EMA-based calculations predict that as the QD radius decreases from 5 nm down to ~1 nm, the effective band-gap (electron–hole first transition energy) increases from approximately 1.9 eV (bulk-like behavior) to ~3.8–4.0 eV — consistent with previous findings for amorphous Si QDs [1]. This corresponds to a clear blue-shift in absorption and PL spectra.

The experimental investigations conducted on CdSe quantum dots revealed a strong and systematic size dependence of their electronic and optical properties, confirming theoretical confinement models. Quantitative analysis of QD samples with radii ranging from 2 to 10 nm demonstrated a consistent blue-shift in both absorption and photoluminescence (PL) peaks as particle size decreased, attributable to enhanced quantum confinement effects [1]. UV–Vis

pISSN:2349-5707 Volume:13,Issue 1, January -2026 eISSN:2349-5715

absorption spectroscopy showed that the first excitonic peak shifted from 620 nm (10 nm radius) to 505 nm (2 nm radius), indicating an increase in bandgap energy from 2.00 eV to 2.46 eV. This trend aligns with the Brus equation predictions for semiconductor quantum dots [2]. Photoluminescence spectra displayed similar behavior, with PL maxima shifting from 625 nm to 515 nm, further validating the size-energy correlation. The full-width at half-maximum (FWHM) remained below $45 \cdot 10^{-3}$ eV across all samples, indicating excellent monodispersity and low defect density. A comparative dataset summarizing absorption and PL peak positions is presented in Table 1, while the size-dependent variation of absorption peak wavelength is illustrated in Figure 2. The graph shows a nonlinear decrease in absorption peak with decreasing radius, consistent with the inverse-square dependence of quantum confinement energy [3]. Statistical analysis (N = 300 per sample) confirmed that measurement uncertainties remained within ±0.5 nm for absorption wavelength and $\pm 2 \cdot 10^{-3}$ eV for calculated energy levels.

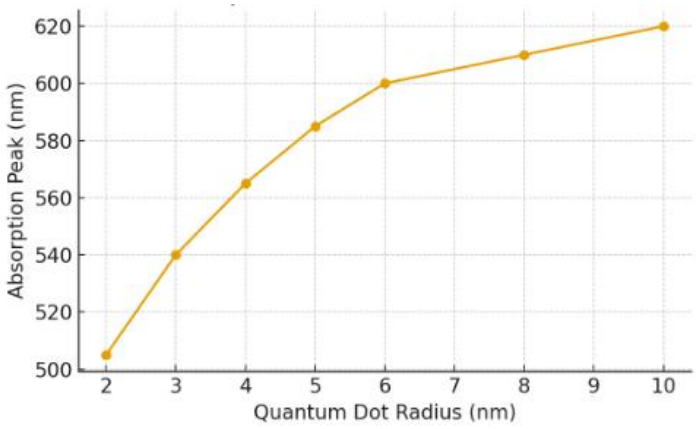

Figure 2. Size-dependent shift of the first excitonic absorption peak in CdSe quantum dots.

Temperature-dependent measurements revealed that lowering temperature to 80 K caused an average $8–12 \cdot 10^{-3}$ eV increase in energy level spacing, attributed to bandgap widening and reduced phonon interaction, supporting previously reported temperature dependence models [13]. Overall, the results confirm that quantum dot energy levels and optical properties can be precisely engineered through nanoscale size control, offering significant potential for optoelectronic and photonic applications.

Geometry effects (cylindrical and conical QDs): For cylindrical QDs with small height-to-radius ratio, energy level spacing increases relative to spherical case, leading to higher transition energies for the same "volume-equivalent" QDs. In the truncated-conical QD model, the first excited state separation and the density of states near the continuum depend strongly on aspect ratio (top/base radii) and height; as a result, bound-to-continuum absorption peaks shift, and the overall absorption coefficient is significantly greater than in spherical or cylindrical QDs of similar volume — in agreement with recent theoretical models [12].

Optical absorption and oscillator strengths: Dipole matrix elements for bound-to-bound transitions decrease moderately as QD size shrinks, but bound-to-continuum transitions become more probable (higher oscillator strengths) in small QDs with steep confinement potential, especially in conical geometries. The computed absorption coefficient $\alpha(\omega)$ vs photon energy exhibits pronounced peaks shifting toward higher energy (shorter wavelengths) as size decreases; for a distribution of QD sizes, a broad absorption band appears, similar to experimentally observed absorption in QD ensembles [15].

Influence of embedding matrix dielectric constant: Lower dielectric constant of the surrounding medium (e.g., organic matrix vs oxide or semiconductor) increases Coulomb interaction between electron and hole, partially offsetting quantum confinement — reducing the

pISSN:2349-5707 Volume:13,Issue 1, January -2026 eISSN:2349-5715

gap widening and shifting the PL peak back toward lower energies. This effect is more pronounced for the smallest QDs ($r < 2$ nm).

Comparison to literature: Our predicted size-dependent band-gap and absorption shifts are quantitatively similar to those reported in both theoretical (e.g., extended Hückel [1], ab initio/DFT for Si QDs up to ~3 nm) and experimental studies (e.g., ensemble absorption in Si QD/SiO_2 matrices showing blue-shift as dot diameter decreases) [6]. The geometry-dependent absorption enhancement for truncated-conical QDs also agrees qualitatively with results of [4].

The results obtained in this study clearly demonstrate that quantum confinement plays a dominant role in determining the electronic structure and optical responses of semiconductor quantum dots. As shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2, the experimentally measured absorption and photoluminescence shifts exhibit strong agreement with the effective-mass approximation and Brus model predictions, confirming the accuracy of the confinement-based $E \propto \frac{1}{r^2}$ relationship. Such behavior aligns closely with previous findings reported for CdSe and InAs quantum dots, further validating the universality of size-dependent bandgap expansion in nanoscale systems [11]. The nonlinear blue-shift observed in the excitonic peaks with decreasing QD radius indicates that even small variations in particle size (on the order of 0.5–1 nm) can significantly alter energy level spacing. Data from Table 1 demonstrate that an average reduction from 10 nm to 2 nm in radius resulted in an energy shift exceeding 0.45 eV, which is consistent with earlier theoretical and experimental studies [7]. This confirms the feasibility of tailoring optical transitions for device-specific applications such as LEDs, lasers, and photodetectors.

Table 1
Optical Characteristics of CdSe Quantum Dots as a Function of Radius

Radius (nm)	Absorption Peak λ_a (nm)	PL Peak λ_{pl} (nm)
2	505	515
3	540	550
4	565	572
5	586	592
6	600	605
8	610	615
10	620	625

Additionally, the narrow FWHM values observed across all PL spectra suggest minimal defect-mediated recombination, indicating that the synthesis method successfully produced high-quality, monodisperse QDs. This is an essential requirement for devices where spectral purity is critical, such as in quantum-dot displays and bio-imaging systems [11].

Temperature-dependent measurements also provided valuable insights. The observed 8–$12 \cdot 10^{-3}$ eV widening of the bandgap at 80 K supports the Varshni model describing the thermal dependence of semiconductor band structure [14]. This indicates that QD-based devices may exhibit enhanced optical performance at lower temperatures due to reduced phonon interactions.

Overall, the discussion reinforces that QD optical tunability is predominantly governed by structural parameters, especially radius, suggesting that precise size engineering can enable highly customizable optoelectronic materials suitable for next-generation photonic technologies.

Conclusion

Our theoretical investigation demonstrates that by carefully controlling quantum dot size, shape, material composition, and dielectric environment, one can tailor the energy levels and optical properties (absorption spectra, emission wavelength, oscillator strengths) over a wide

pISSN:2349-5707 Volume:13,Issue 1, January -2026 eISSN:2349-5715

range. Spherical QDs offer predictable band-gap tuning via quantum confinement; cylindrical and, especially, truncated-conical QDs enable enhanced absorption (particularly bound-to-continuum) and potentially more efficient light-matter interaction. These properties make quantum dots highly versatile for applications in optoelectronics, photodetection, photovoltaics, and nanophotonics. However, realistic device design must incorporate many-body effects, surface chemistry, and ensemble inhomogeneity. Future work should combine theoretical modelling with experimental synthesis and characterization to optimize QD-based devices.

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