



## Research article

# Effect of interface defects on electrical characteristics of a-ITGZO TFTs under bottom, top, and dual gatings

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## ABSTRACT

Here, we investigate the effects of interface defects on the electrical characteristics of amorphous indium-tin-gallium-zinc oxide (a-ITGZO) thin-film transistors (TFTs) utilizing bottom, top, and dual gatings. The field-effect mobility ( $27.3 \text{ cm}^2/\text{V}\cdot\text{s}$ ) and subthreshold swing ( $222 \text{ mV/decade}$ ) under a dual gating is substantially better than those under top ( $12.6 \text{ cm}^2/\text{V}\cdot\text{s}$ ,  $301 \text{ mV/decade}$ ) and bottom ( $11.1 \text{ cm}^2/\text{V}\cdot\text{s}$ ,  $487 \text{ mV/decade}$ ) gatings. For an a-ITGZO TFT, oxygen deficiencies are more prevalent in the bottom-gate dielectric interface than in the top-gate dielectric interface, and they are less prevalent inside the channel layer than at the interfaces, indicating that the presence of oxygen deficiencies significantly affects the field-effect mobility and subthreshold swing. Moreover, the variation in the electrical characteristics due to the positive bias stress is discussed here.

## 1. Introduction

Amorphous oxide thin-film transistors (TFTs) have been extensively utilized in display backplanes, and their low-temperature processes allow the freedom of choice for flexible plastic substrates deformed at high temperatures [1–13]. Channel oxide materials have been intensively studied to enhance their electrical characteristics, including field-effect mobilities [14–18]. The properties of the interfaces between the channels and gate dielectric layers and the intrinsic properties of the channel materials determine the electrical characteristics. In particular, field-effect mobilities are closely related to the interface defects generated during fabrication [19–21]. Minimizing the effect of interface defects on the electrical characteristics is important for attaining high-performance oxide TFTs.

The electrical characteristics of the oxide TFTs depend on the gating type. Top, bottom, and dual gatings result in the accumulation of charge carriers near the upper and lower interfaces and bulk accumulation, respectively. Accordingly, the upper and lower interface defects substantially affect the electrical characteristics under top and bottom gatings, respectively. However, these interface defects have a relatively small effect on the electrical characteristics under a dual gating, which enhances the field-effect mobility by forming bulk accumulation [22–24]. Hence, the electrical characteristics of oxide TFTs with top, bottom, and dual gatings were compared to investigate the effects of interface defects. The hysteresis and threshold voltage shift induced by positive bias stress (PBS) under these gatings were examined, and the change in the subgap state distribution was analyzed with technology computer-aided design (TCAD)

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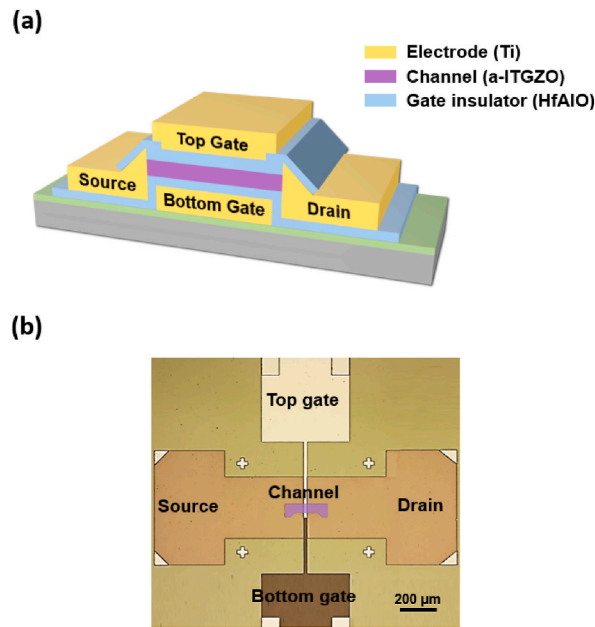


Fig. 1. (a) Schematic and (b) optical microscope image of a-ITGZO TFT with top and bottom gate electrodes.

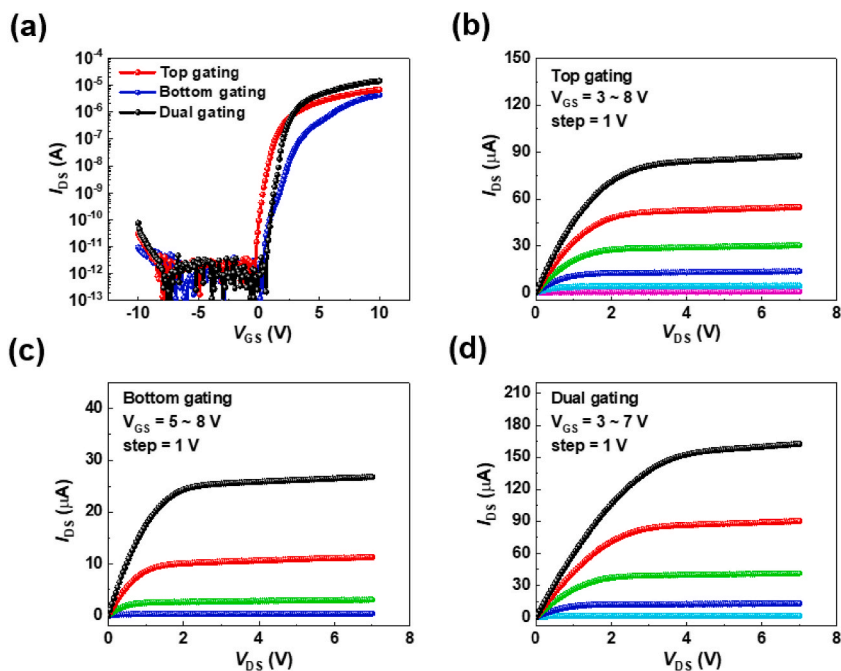


Fig. 2. (a) Transfer characteristics of top, bottom, and dual-gated TFTs. Output characteristics of TFTs under (b) top, (c) bottom, and (d) dual gateings.

simulations.

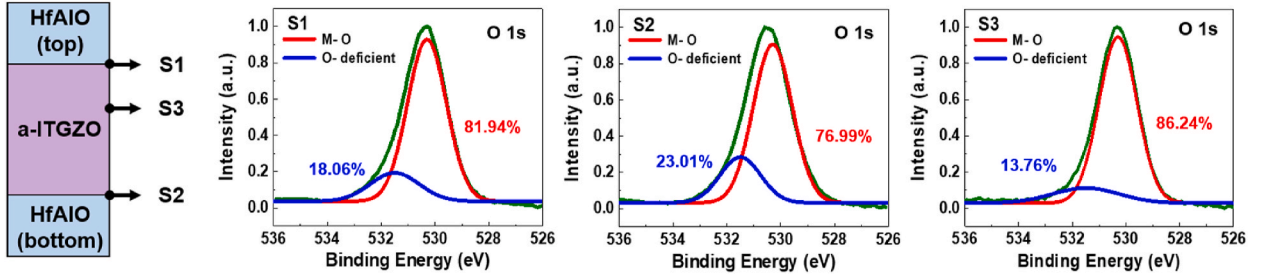
## 2. Experiment

We selected amorphous indium tin gallium zinc oxide (a-ITGZO) and hafnium aluminum oxide (HfAlO) as the channel material and gate dielectric, respectively. a-ITGZO TFTs were fabricated on a colorless polyimide substrate with a 15-nm-thick  $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$  buffer layer deposited via atomic layer deposition (ALD) to prevent the penetration of oxygen and moisture. An a-ITGZO channel layer with a

**Table 1**  
Electrical properties of top, bottom, and dual-gated TFTs.

Mode	$\mu_{FE}$ (cm <sup>2</sup> /V•s)	SS (mV/decade)	$V_{TH}$ (V)	$I_{ON}/I_{OFF}$
Top	12.6 ± 1.8	301 ± 28	1.16 ± 0.23	6.70 × 10 <sup>6</sup>
Bottom	11.1 ± 3.3	487 ± 60	2.17 ± 0.41	3.49 × 10 <sup>6</sup>
Dual	27.3 ± 6.3	222 ± 62	1.41 ± 0.55	1.97 × 10 <sup>7</sup>

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**Fig. 3.** XPS deconvolution of O 1s spectra at top and bottom interfaces.

thickness of 50 nm was deposited from an ITGZO target utilizing radio frequency (RF) magnetron sputtering under a gas mixture of Ar/O<sub>2</sub> at a working pressure of 1 mTorr and an RF power of 120 W. The length (width) of the channel layer was 20 (50) μm. The source, drain, and gate electrodes were made of Ti by thermal evaporation, and a 25-nm-thick HfAlO gate dielectric layer was deposited by ALD at 150 °C with H<sub>2</sub>O as an oxidant and tetrakis (ethylmethylamino) hafnium and trimethylaluminum as precursors of Hf and Al.

The thicknesses of the a-ITGZO and HfAlO layers were measured with X-ray reflectometry (D8 Discover Plus, Bruker), and the oxygen bonding states were examined with X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS; ESCALAB250, Thermo Scientific). The capacitances of the gate dielectric layers were measured with an LCR meter (HP4285A, Agilent), and the I–V characteristics were examined with a semiconductor parameter analyzer (HP4155C, Agilent) in ambient air and a dark box. As for the PBS condition, a voltage of 5 V was applied to the top and bottom gate electrodes, and a voltage of 0.1 V was applied to the drain electrode. Silvaco Atlas (version 5.0.10. R) was utilized as a TCAD device simulator.

### 3. Results and discussion

**Fig. 1** presents a schematic (a) and an optical microscope image (b) of the a-ITGZO TFT with top and bottom gate electrodes, which can be electrically tied together for a dual gating. **Fig. 2** illustrates the transfer curves (a) and output curves (b–d) of the TFT under the top, bottom, and dual gateings; the transfer curves were obtained at a drain-to-source voltage ( $V_{DS}$ ) of 0.1 V. The field-effect mobility ( $\mu_{FE}$ ) in the linear regime and the subthreshold swing (SS) are estimated with the following equations.

$$I_{DS} = \frac{C_{ox}\mu}{2} \frac{W}{L} [2(V_{GS} - V_{TH})V_{DS} - V_{DS}^2] \quad (1)$$

$$SS = \frac{\partial V_{GS}}{\partial(\log I_{DS})} \quad (2)$$

where  $I_{DS}$  is the drain-to-source current,  $C_{ox}$  (=286 nF/cm<sup>2</sup>) is the gate dielectric capacitance per unit area,  $W/L$  (50/20 μm) is the ratio of the channel width to the length, and  $V_{TH}$  is the threshold voltage determined as the  $V_{GS}$  corresponding to  $I_{DS}$  of  $W/L \times 10$  nA. The  $\mu_{FE}$  values are 12.6, 11.1, and 27.3 cm<sup>2</sup>/V•s for the top, bottom, and dual gateings, respectively. The SS values are 301, 487, and 222 mV/decade for the top, bottom, and dual gateings, respectively. **Table 1** presents the field-effect mobilities, subthreshold swings, threshold voltages, and ON/OFF current ratios ( $I_{ON}/I_{OFF}$ ). A comparison of these values reveals that the electrical characteristics under a bottom gating are inferior to those under a top gating and that the electrical characteristics under a dual gating are better than those under both top and bottom gateings.

The metal–oxygen (M – O) and oxygen-deficient (O-deficient) bonds of the S1 (S2) interface between the channel and top (bottom) gate dielectric layers and the inner part S3 of the channel were examined by XPS. **Fig. 3** illustrates the XPS deconvolution of the O 1s spectra of S1, S2, and S3. An O 1s spectrum can be deconvoluted into an M – O bonding peak at 530.3 eV and an O-deficient peak at 531.5 eV, and the ratios of the O-deficient bonding at S1, S2, and S3 are 18.06, 23.01, and 13.76 %, respectively. Oxygen deficiencies are more prevalent at the interfaces than inside the channel layer, and they are more prevalent at the lower interface than at the upper interface. The surface of the bottom-gate dielectric layer beneath the channel layer is exposed to plasma during channel formation.

The presence of oxygen deficiencies that act as traps degrades the electrical characteristics of a-ITGZO TFT. A comparison between the electrical characteristics under the top, bottom, and dual gateings and the ratios of the O-deficient bonding at S1, S2, and S3 reveals

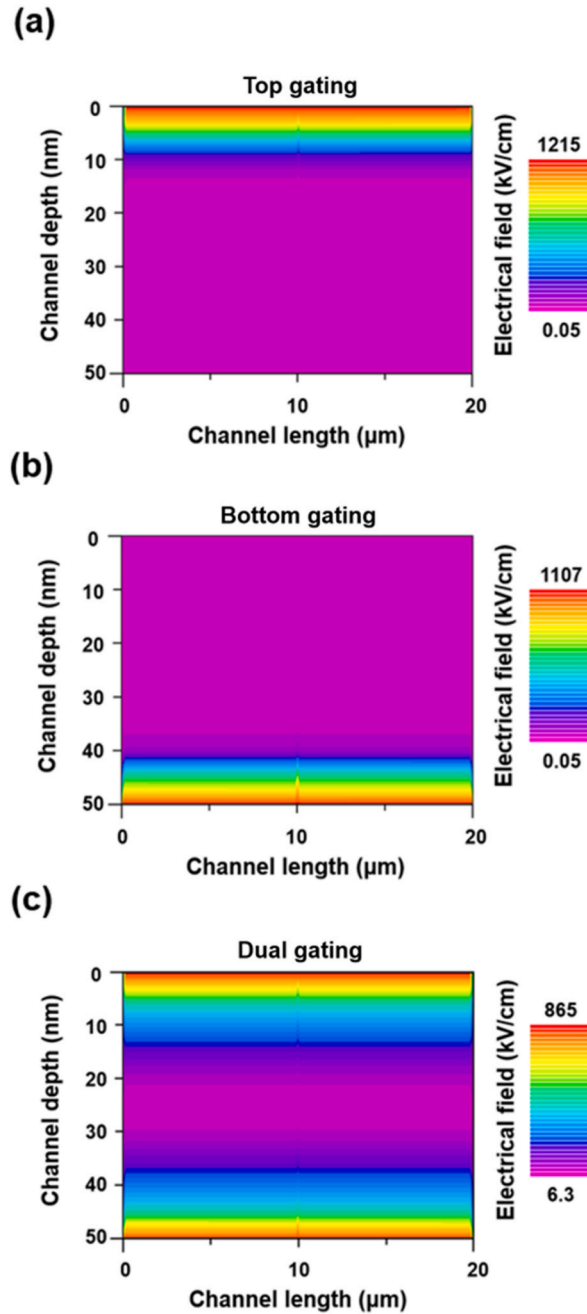


Fig. 4. Vertical electric field in channels of (a) top, (b) bottom, and (c) dual-gated TFTs at gate voltage of 10 V.

that the presence of oxygen deficiencies at the interfaces affects the electrical characteristics under the bottom gating more than those under the top gating. They have relatively less effect on the electrical characteristics under the dual gating than the top and bottom gates.

Fig. 4 illustrates the vertical electric field in the channel under the top (a), bottom (b), and dual (c) gateings at a gate voltage of 10 V. The vertical electric field causes scattering of charge carriers at the interface between the channel and gate dielectric layers, and thereby the vertical electric field affects the  $\mu_{FE}$  [25–27]. Compared with the top ( $1215 \text{ kVcm}^{-1}$ ) and bottom ( $1107 \text{ kVcm}^{-1}$ ) gateings, the vertical electric field in the dual-gated ( $865 \text{ kVcm}^{-1}$ ) channel is relatively low; hence, the dual-gated TFT has a higher  $\mu_{FE}$  than the top and bottom gated TFTs. Moreover, the gated region in the channel of the dual-gated TFT was deeper than the sum of the two parallel-gated regions of the top- and bottom-gated TFTs, implying that bulk accumulation occurred in the dual-gated TFT. The bulk accumulation enhances the  $\mu_{FE}$  and  $I_{ON}/I_{OFF}$  of the dual-gated TFT along with the relatively low vertical electrical field. The  $I_{ON}/I_{OFF}$

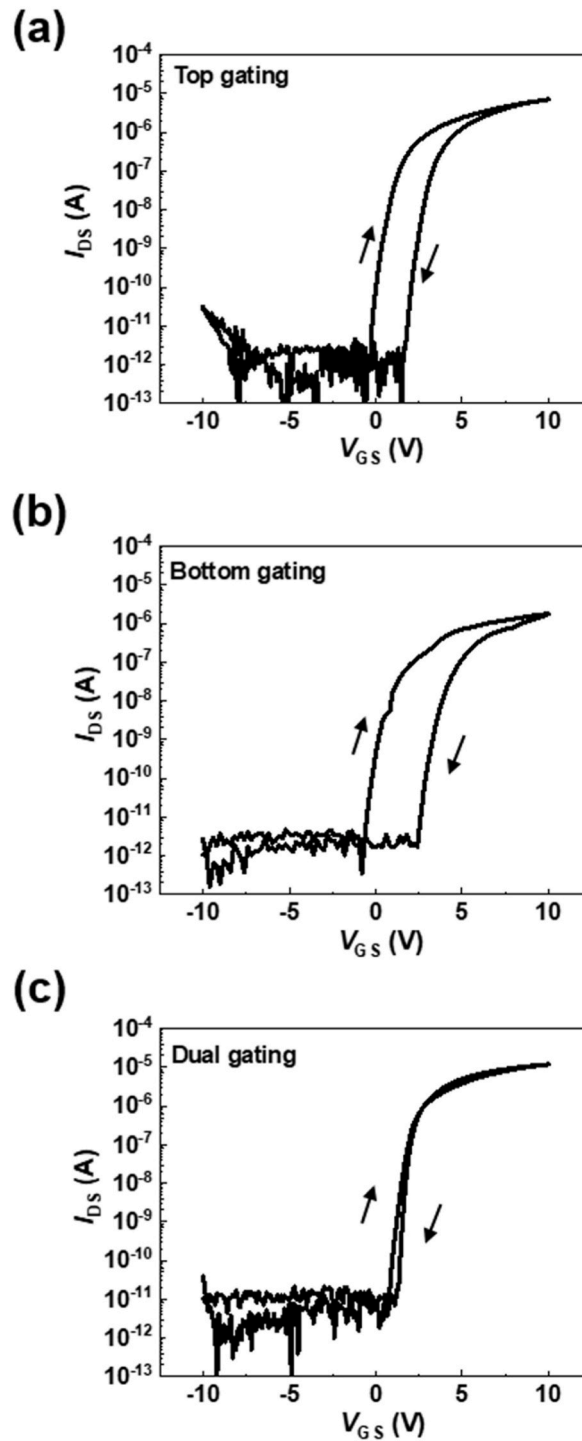
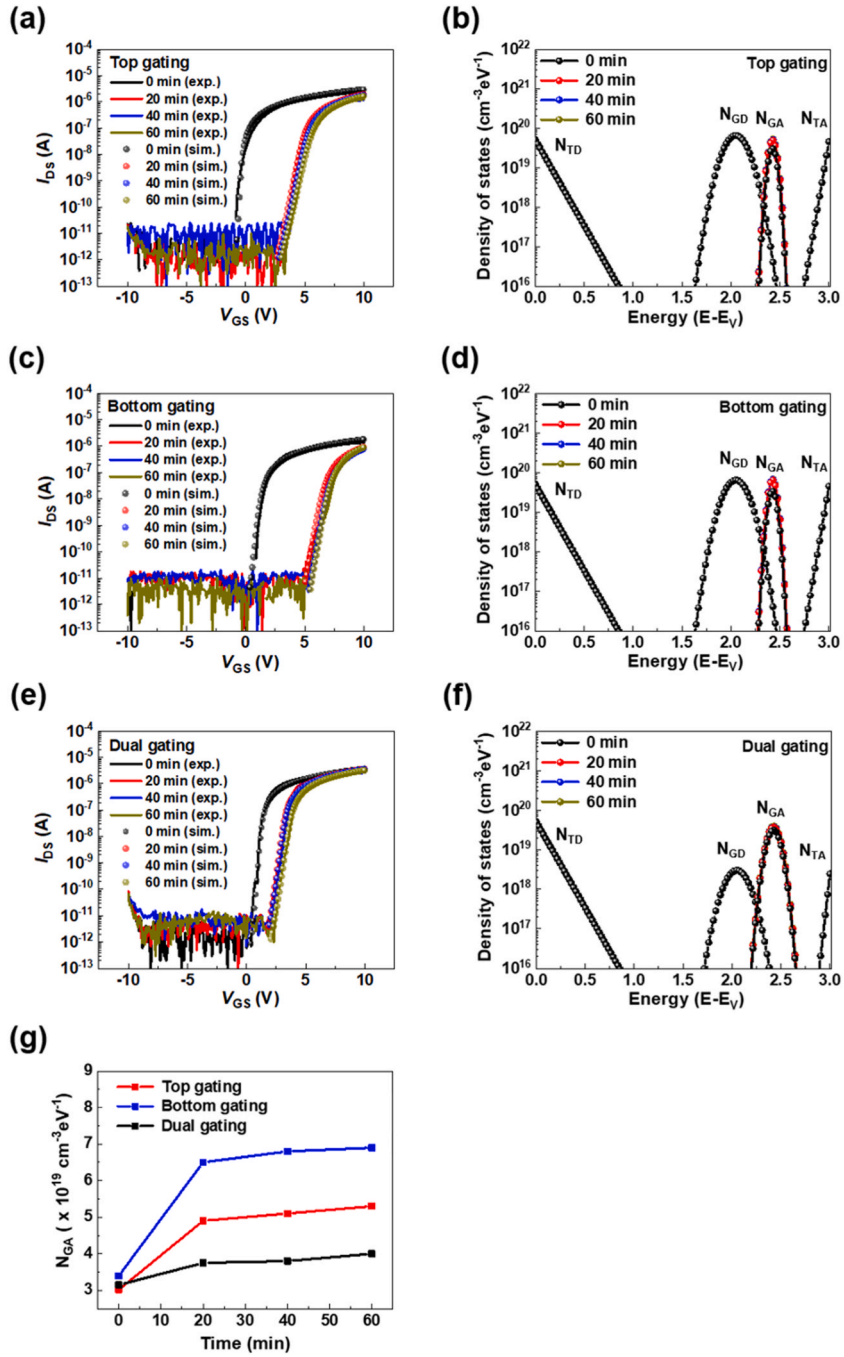


Fig. 5. Hysteresis curves of TFTs under (a) top, (b) bottom, and (c) dual gateings.

values are  $6.70 \times 10^6$ ,  $3.49 \times 10^6$ , and  $1.97 \times 10^7$  for the top, bottom, and dual gateings, respectively.

Hysteresis characteristics reflect the density of interface traps ( $D_{it}$ ) between the channel and gate dielectric layers [28]. Fig. 5 presents the hysteresis curves under the top (a), bottom (b), and dual (c) gateings, indicating clockwise hysteresis regardless of the gating type. The hysteresis widths are 1.97, 2.99, and 0.20 V for the top, bottom, and dual gateings, respectively.  $D_{it}$  was determined with the following equation.



**Fig. 6.** Transfer curves under PBS and TCAD simulation fitting of (a) top, (c) bottom, and (e) dual-gated TFTs. Density of state of a-ITGZO in (b) top, (d) bottom, and (f) dual-gated TFTs under PBS. (g)  $N_{GA}$  of dual, top, and bottom gated TFTs under PBS.

$$D_{it} = \left( \frac{SS}{\frac{k_B T}{q} \ln 10} - 1 \right) \frac{C_{ox}}{q} \tag{3}$$

where  $k_B$  is the Boltzmann constant,  $T$  is the absolute temperature, and  $q$  is the charge quantity [29]. The  $D_{it}$  values are calculated to be  $6.4 \times 10^{12}$ ,  $1.1 \times 10^{13}$ , and  $4.3 \times 10^{12} \text{ cm}^{-2} \text{ eV}^{-1}$  for the top, bottom, and dual gatings, respectively, which is deeply concerned with the hysteresis width.

The hysteresis width and  $D_{it}$  values were consistent with the ratios of O-deficient bonding, indicating that they were caused by oxygen deficiencies at the interfaces. The large hysteresis width and high  $D_{it}$  value of the bottom-gated TFT were ascribed to oxygen deficiencies at the interface caused by the plasma during the deposition of the a-ITGZO channel. The dual-gated TFT has the same interfaces as those of the top- and bottom-gated TFTs; therefore, the  $D_{it}$  values reveal the relationship between the dual-gating effect and the effect of defects on the electrical characteristics. Thus, the performance of the TFT can be improved by a dual gating, even though the TFT has interface defects between the channel and gate dielectric.

The transfer curves of the a-ITGZO TFT under the top (a), bottom (c), and dual (e) gatings were fitted with a TCAD simulation (Fig. 6) to analyze the change in the subgap trap states of the a-ITGZO TFTs during PBS. After the PBS for 60 min, the positive threshold voltage shifts ( $\Delta V_{TH}$ ) are 5.09, 5.69, and 2.50 V for the top, bottom, and dual gatings, respectively. The densities of the states in PBS demonstrate that there are no differences in the distributions of the donor-like tail states ( $N_{TD}$ ), donor-like Gaussian states ( $N_{GD}$ ), and acceptor-like tail states ( $N_{TA}$ ) for the top (b), bottom (d), and dual (f) gatings. However, the density of acceptor-like Gaussian states ( $N_{GA}$ ) increases with the duration of the PBS, regardless of the gating mode. The positive  $\Delta V_{TH}$  after the PBS is attributed to electron trapping at the interface [30,31]. The  $N_{GA}$  is associated with the neutral oxygen interstitial ( $O_i$ ) state that traps electrons and generates negatively charged species of oxygen such as  $O_i^-$  or  $O_i^{2-}$  ( $O + e \rightarrow O^-$  or  $O + 2e \rightarrow O^{2-}$ ) [32,33]. Fig. 6 (g) illustrates  $N_{GA}$  in PBS. After 60 min, the  $N_{GA}$  increased to 75.5 %, 102 %, and 27 % for the top, bottom, and dual gatings, respectively. A larger increase of  $N_{GA}$  under the bottom and top gatings induces a significant  $\Delta V_{TH}$  after the PBS, while a relatively smaller increase of  $N_{GA}$  under the dual gating leads to a relatively insignificant  $\Delta V_{TH}$ . Thus, interface defects lower the performance of TFTs, and a dual gating is an effective way to minimize their effects on electrical characteristics.

#### 4. Conclusion

We examined the effect of interface defects on the electrical characteristics of a-ITGZO TFTs by comparing the electrical characteristics of top, bottom, and dual gatings. The presence of defects at the interfaces affects the electrical characteristics under a bottom gating more than those under a top gating, and they affect the electrical characteristics under a dual gating, which is relatively less than that under top and bottom gatings. Dual gating minimizes the effects of interface defects on electrical characteristics.

#### CRedit authorship contribution statement

**Mingu Kang:** Writing – review & editing, Visualization, Validation, Software, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization, Writing – original draft. **Kyoungah Cho:** Writing – review & editing, Project administration, Methodology, Conceptualization. **Minhyeok Seol:** Writing – review & editing, Software, Investigation, Data curation. **Sangsub Kim:** Writing – review & editing, Resources, Conceptualization. **Sangsig Kim:** Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Project administration, Resources.

#### Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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#### Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e34134>.

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