

NEUROGAZE IN VIRTUAL REALITY: ASSESSING AN EEG AND EYE TRACKING INTERFACE  
AGAINST TRADITIONAL VIRTUAL REALITY INPUT DEVICES

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

Presenting NeuroGaze, a novel Virtual Reality (VR) interface that integrates electroencephalogram (EEG) and eye-tracking technologies to enhance user interaction within virtual environments (VEs). Diverging from traditional VR input devices, NeuroGaze allows users to select objects in a VE through gaze direction and cognitive intent, captured via EEG signals. The research assesses NeuroGaze's performance against conventional input devices such as VR controllers and eye gaze combined with hand gestures. The experiment, conducted with 20 participants, evaluates task completion time, accuracy, cognitive load through the NASA-TLX surveys and user preference through a Post Evaluation survey. Results indicate that while NeuroGaze presents a learning curve, evidenced by longer average task durations, it potentially offers a more accurate selection method with lower cognitive load, as suggested by its lower error rate and significant difference in NASA-TLX scores for some subscales. This study highlights the viability of incorporating biometric inputs for more accessible and less demanding VR interactions. Future work aims to explore a multimodal EEG-Functional near infrared spectroscopy (fNIRS) approach, further develop machine learning models for EEG signal classification, and extend system capabilities to dynamic objects selection, highlighting the progressive direction for the use of Brain Computer Interfaces (BCI) in virtual environments.

Dedicated to all my family, friends and colleagues who never stopped believing in me.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

1. 3DUI - Three-Dimensional User Interface: A user interface that involves interaction with three-dimensional space, allowing users to manipulate 3D objects or navigate through 3D environments using various input devices.
2. AR - Augmented Reality: A technology that overlays digital content (such as images, sounds, text) on the real world, enhancing the user's perception of their surroundings through devices like smartphones, tablets, or AR glasses.
3. BCI - Brain-Computer Interface: A direct communication pathway between a brain and an external device, enabling control of the device using brain signals, often measured via EEG for non-invasive BCIs or implanted electrodes for invasive BCIs.
4. EEG - Electroencephalography: A method to record electrical activity of the brain using electrodes placed along the scalp. EEG measures voltage fluctuations resulting from ionic current flows within the neurons of the brain, widely used in neuroscience, cognitive psychology, and BCI applications.
5. FNIRS - Functional Near-Infrared Spectroscopy: A non-invasive imaging technique that measures brain activity by detecting changes in blood oxygenation and blood volume within the cortex, using near-infrared light.
6. HCI - Human-Computer Interaction: A multidisciplinary field of study focusing on the design of computer technology, and particularly the interaction between humans (the users) and computers. HCI studies how to design, evaluate, and implement interactive computing systems for human use.

7. MR - Mixed Reality: A blend of physical and digital worlds, creating new environments where physical and digital objects co-exist and interact in real-time. MR is often seen as a spectrum that encompasses both augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR).
8. POC - Proof of Concept: A demonstration, typically in the early stages of development, to verify certain concepts or theories can be achieved in development. In technology, a POC tests a prototype of an idea to validate its feasibility, functionality, or potential for further development.
9. VE - Virtual Environment: A digital space generated by computer technology, simulating a real or imagined environment. VEs are interactive, allowing users to navigate and manipulate virtual objects or perform tasks. They are commonly used in VR systems.
10. VR - Virtual Reality: A simulated experience that can be like or completely different from the real world. VR technology creates a fully immersive environment, often engaging sight and sound, and increasingly touch, through specialized hardware like VR headsets, gloves, and treadmills.

# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Motivation

From my earliest memories, I've been captivated by the idea of existing in a virtual world — an enhanced version of our reality possible through digital innovation. My journey as a mixed reality engineer, crafting experience in virtual reality (VR), is the closest I've come to creating this *New World*. Yet, the challenge persists: the input devices currently available to interact with these virtual worlds have either made me feel disconnected from the virtual environment (VE) or the controls are too cumbersome. This disconnect highlights an opportunity for innovation in how we interact and engage with these virtual environments.

Selection within VEs is where I feel the most disconnected with the VE due to the need to either remember specific hand gestures mid-game or maintain a constant arm motion to point and select objects. The discovery of brain computer interfaces (BCI) through *Toward Brain-Computer Interfacing* by Guido Dornhege led me to wonder what applications the technology might have in virtual environments. Could BCIs be the secret I've been looking to unlocking a new level of interaction with virtual environments?

Existing research highlights the feasibility of using electroencephalogram (EEG) recordings from the brain combined with eye gaze can be used to interact with computers [15]. Other research utilizing VR investigates how EEG and eye gaze can be used to evaluate engagement [3] or how eye movement artifacts found within EEG readings during VR simulations can be used to build artifact correction methods [21]. In my literature reviews, I have found that research involving BCI in VR primarily use VR as a medium to simulate environments not easily replicable in the non-virtual environments to record EEG data. However, there is a gap in research specifically attempting to segment and classify artifacts in EEG streams with the intent of selection or interaction in VR. My goal for this thesis is to build on the scarce

literature in the space of using non-invasive BCIs to interact and select objects in virtual environments with the hope paving a pathway for future work to be done in this area of study.

## **1.2 Input Devices**

### **1.2.1 NeuroGaze – Eye Tracking & Electroencephalogram**

NeuroGaze is a novel selection method we developed that utilizes infrared (IR) cameras built into a VR head mounted display (HMD) to track where a user is looking in a VE. NeuroGaze also uses EEG to determine when a user would like to select an object once they have both looked at the object and thought about selecting it. This technique aims to provide users with a more intuitive experience when selecting objects in VR while continuing to maintain the level of reliability and usability users would expect when using traditional interaction methods (e.g. VR controllers).

### **1.2.2 Eye Gaze & Hand Tracking**

Eye gaze and hand tracking is a selection method that uses eye tracking for users to *hover* over objects they would like to select and hand tracking to select or interact with objects. The *trigger* for these hand tracking actions is usually done utilizing gestures. Gestures use specific hand movement and positions to specify a command in a VE [16]. Specific to our evaluation, participants used a pinch gesture to select objects within the VE. Recently, this technique has been showcased by the Apple Vision Pro for all selection within the AR environment.

### **1.2.3 VR Controllers**

VR controllers are handheld devices that allow users to interact with a VE. They are designed to be used as selection devices enabling users to navigate through menus, select items and interact with objects within a VE. For selection, participants will use a point and click interaction technique where a ray will be cast from the end of the VR controllers that participants can use to determine where they can interact with the VE and the controller triggers are used to selection objects. VR controllers allow users to

have precise control over selection and manipulation tasks but can be physically tiring when used for a longer duration [17].

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Input Modalities in Virtual Reality

#### 2.1.1 VR Controllers

Early VR systems relied on basic input devices such as keyboards, mice, or joysticks, which did not provide a natural or intuitive way to interact with VEs. The development of dedicated VR controllers marked a significant advancement, offering users a more immersive and hands-on VR experience. Point-and-click, like a mouse and keyboard in traditional computer interfaces, is a widely used interaction technique in VR. Studies have investigated the efficiency and accuracy of point-and-click interactions using VR controllers, highlighting their effectiveness for selection and manipulating objects in 3D space. Over the years, research has been done expanding on these devices in new and interesting ways with the goal of building upon the initial VR controllers.

An example of this can be seen in Whitmire et al [23] who developed a unique handheld controller, denoted the *Haptic Revolver*, utilizing an actuated wheel. As participants spin a haptic wheel on the controller to move around the VE, the controller provides users with tactical feedback that can be interchanged with different wheels. This allows users to experience a variety of accurate haptic information depending on the VR scene. Although haptics is outside of the scope of this Thesis and the NeuroGaze system does not include haptic feedback, it is important to recognize the use of haptics to provide users with a more intuitive and immersive experience.

Fahmi et al. [7] investigated the overall user experience of VIVE VR controllers when compared to a Leap Motion Controller (LMC) and Senso Gloves. LMCs use an infrared monochromatic camera that periodically takes pictures [7]. An observation area is set and when a user's hand enters this area, the hand gestures are recorded, and an action is performed in VR. Senso Gloves are wireless devices that use



Inertia Measurement Unit (IMU) sensors to observe hand and finger movement. This device also includes haptic feed in the form of vibrators in the fingertips, back of hand and wrists [19]. When a user experience study was conducted, high Likert scale values for the VIVE VR controllers suggested that participants felt that VR controllers were very interactive, and the controls were easy to learn and use. When ideating on how to use EEG effectively as a part of the NeuroGaze input device, the first challenge was how to leverage a user's previous experience with input devices such as VR controllers. Although NeuroGaze does not use VR controllers, the system should still feel intuitive and easy to use. Studies like Fahmi et al. show us that if NeuroGaze is designed with the same level of interactivity, intuitiveness, and satisfaction as VR controllers, then participants would be more inclined to report a positive user experience. Intuitiveness and ease-of-use is only a fraction of the user experience, the input system should also perform tasks successfully and effectively. Luong et al. [18] evaluates the interaction performance of VR controllers when compared to hand controllers. Only the VR controllers utilized the virtual pointer metaphor which alleviates a major shortcoming of the input devices: interacting with objects that are out of reach [2]. This study showed that for the interactions, participants preferred VR controllers with ray cast because of the precision they could get. Additionally, these participants performed better when evaluated on both speed and accuracy than they did while using the virtual hand. It was decided that NeuroGaze would use some type of ray casting as the interaction metaphor of choice due to its speed and intuitiveness to use. However, a common complaint with using the ray pointing with VR controllers for longer durations is physical strain. In research evaluating this input device and metaphor, participants start to hold the controller closer to their body to reduce fatigue [2]. For this reason, it was determined that the NeuroGaze system would not be using VR controllers despite its intuitiveness to use. Looking deeper into how prolonged use of input devices can cause fatigue, we investigated input devices that were compatible with the ray casting metaphor [2] but did not induce as much physical effort as VR controllers over longer

durations of time. The next steps in developing the NeuroGaze system pointed towards eye tracking as a possible host for the ray casting metaphor.

### 2.1.2 Eye Gaze

Eye gaze uses eye tracking technology to measure a user's gaze direction, or where the person is looking, and the movement of the users' eyes. This input method is usually achieved with infrared cameras that illuminate the eye by refracting light off the cornea and the retina to create distinct patterns, called glints. Software like RemoteEye developed by Hosp et al. [8] uses glint detection algorithms to calculate the gaze point and achieve high speed eye tracking capabilities. When applied to VR as an input device, an entire genre of interaction technique presents itself. Novel techniques like the ones evaluated by Piumsomboon et al. [20], show us the versatility of the eye gaze input device. In this evaluation, three selection techniques based on eye gaze were evaluated. The first, *Duo-Reticles*, uses one eye-gaze and one inertial reticle to perform selection. *Radial Pursuit* specializes in selecting cluttered objects with smooth pursuit by creating a sphere of influence where the user looks and all objects within slowly separate for users to select. *Nod and Roll* is a hand gesture-based interaction based on the vestibulo-ocular reflex. These techniques in combination highlight the four primary natural types of eye movements [23] that should be studied when constructing an eye gaze-based technique for selection. These include (1) *saccade*, a quick eye movement with a fixed end target (demonstrated by Duo-Reticles), (2) *smooth pursuit*, a smooth eye movement towards a moving target (demonstrated by Radial Pursuit), (3) vestibulo-ocular reflex (VOR), an automatic eye movement that counters head movement when a user's gaze is fixed on a target (demonstrated by Nod and Roll), and finally (4) vergence, when our eyes converge or diverge to look at targets of varying distance. Participants were tasked with finding a matching picture as quickly and accurately as possible. Participants were then asked to answer a 7-point Likert scale usability questionnaire that asked them to rank the input devices with statements like "It felt natural the use" and "I felt satisfied using it." The results showed that the Duo-Reticle was highly favored with high significance

when compared to the other input devices. When considering eye gaze as a part of the NeuroGaze input device, we needed to decide not only what technique to use to improve the usability this input device, but also which would be best for our experimental design. At an early stage in our experimental design, we wanted to focus on moving targets but as we learned more about EEG, we realized that limiting kinematic activity, especially head movement, would be greatly beneficial to the success of a BCI. The evaluation of input methods that take advantage of saccade [9], such as Duo-Reticles, showed us how NeuroGaze could take advantage of the eyes natural ability to rapidly update to new stationary targets. With this in mind, we were curious how quickly the eye could update to a new stationary target when compared to existing input methods, like VR controllers, that depended on the speed of a user arm to achieve low completion times.

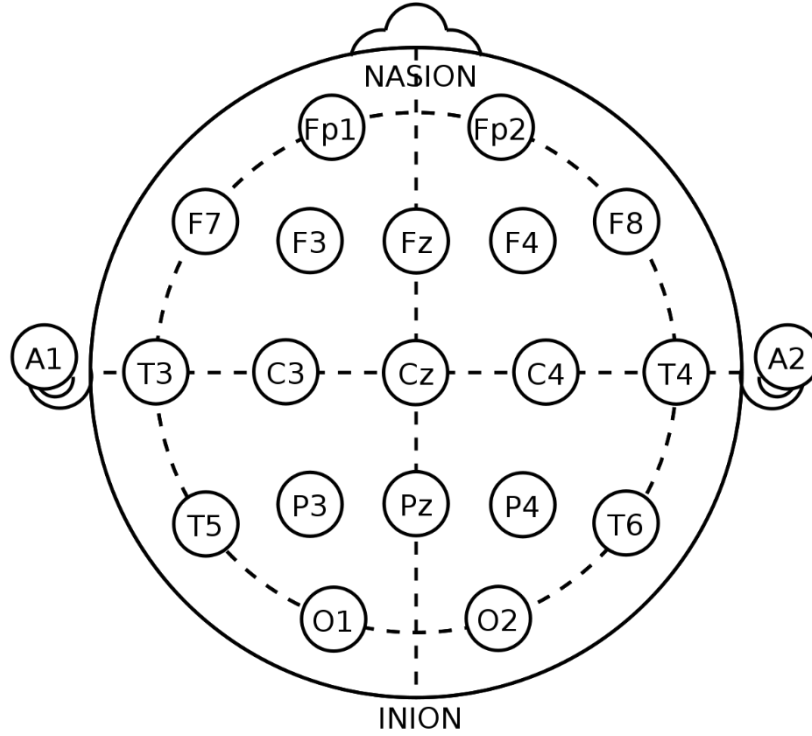
Francisco et al. [17] evaluated VR controller accuracy when compared to an eye gaze technique using the previously mentioned ray casting metaphor to perform aiming selection tasks [2]. To evaluate how demanding the input devices were, a raw NASA-TLX survey was distributed to participants. A system usability scale (SUS) survey was also completed by participants. Before evaluation, participants were asked to complete an eye tracking calibration test. Then participants were requested to use their eye gaze to look at a target of interest and use VR controllers to select the object. The same evaluation was performed with VR controllers with a point and click technique. The evaluation results showed that the eye gaze input method performed on par with VR controllers with low statistical significance between task completion times across input devices. The survey results showed participants felt that the eye gaze input method produced a lower Physical Demand and Effort than VR controllers. At this point in our literature review we were able to determine that eye tracking is not only as performant as VR controllers, but also produces less physical demand and effort than VR controllers when selecting fixed target. Under varying fields of view (FOV), eye gaze even performed better than head-gaze based selection [17, 23]. Based on our literature reviews, eye tracking seemed to be the most accurate intuitive, and least cognitively

intensive way to allow users in a VE to show intent for selecting an item. With BCIs still in our minds, we turned towards research in this area and the best techniques, hardware, and strategies for integration with eye gaze given the limitations and scope of this Thesis.

### **2.1.3 Brain Computer Interfaces**

Brain computer interfaces harness neural signals that are usually translated into commands that can interface with a computer system. The area of study has broadened itself in the last 15 years and its applications have increased in range including technologies like robotics, Internet of Things (IoT), and VR [24]. In recent years, invasive neural interfaces have seen human testing, such as intracortical recordings. This process involves implanting neural interfaces composed of biocompatible materials with the goal of curing existing limitations of a user or even enhancing them [14]. While it is important to be cognizant of invasive interfaces, this scope of this Thesis is strictly focused on signal acquisition using non-invasive methods (e.g. EEG).

Electroencephalogram, or EEG, is a non-invasive recording of electrical activity along the scalp. Specifically, EEG is the measure of the voltage fluctuations resulting from ionic current flows within the neurons in the brain. [12]. EEG data has been used in a variety of use cases such as medical diagnostics for neurological disorders [10], cognitive and behavior research and BCIs. With a multitude of areas of research using EEGs, standards must be practiced when placing electrodes on the scalp or it becomes difficult to compare EEG data across evaluations. The collection of EEG data is dependent on the electrode system chosen.



*Figure 1: Electrode locations of International 10-20 system for EEG recordings*

The 10-20 electrode system, or International 10-20 system, is an internally recognized method to describe and apply the location of scalp electrodes in the context of an EEG test or experiment [12]. In *Figure 1*, we can observe a top-down view of the head where the nasion, the depressed area between the eyes, is the front of the head, and the Inion, the crest of the back of the skull, is the back of the head. The “10” and “20” refers to the 10% or 20% of spacing between each adjacent electrode, starting from ear to ear. The starting letter is used to identify a lobe or area of the brain: central (C), occipital (O), parietal (P), temporal (T), and pre-frontal (Fp). The following number represents the side of the brain where even numbers (2,4,6,8) represent the electrodes on the right side of the brain and odd numbers (1,3,5,7) represent the left side of the brain. With standardized electrode placement, researchers build upon previous works with little variances in electrode placement on a participant's scalp. It should be noted that other systems exist such as 10/5 and 10/10 but are not internationally recognized nor do they have noticeable performance increase when evaluating quality of the EEG data [10]. The 10-20 system is the current

standard when collecting EEG data and NeuroGaze is compliant with this standard. Until other electrode placement standards are established or new positioning systems [11] are created and tested thoroughly, we do not plan to diverge from this standard.

Larsen et al. [15] recently published a paper evaluating selection in VR using a similar input method as NeuroGaze. The paper showcased a proof of concept (POC) called *SSVEP-Speller* which uses eye trackers to make a preselection of a subsection of a virtual 3D keyboard to select a letter. EEG is used to measure the temporal difference between the time it takes to completely close the eyes during a blink. Electrodes were placed over the occipital region at O1, Oz, O2, P3, P7, Pz, P8 and P4 to record EEG data of the visual stimuli. To collect data for their temporal blink classifier, participants were instructed to wear the EEG headset while holding a VR headset to their head and blink naturally with both eyes at about a rate of 60 blinks per minute. During evaluation, participants were tasked with looking at letters they wanted to select while varying levels of flickering occurred, turning their screen completely black, to simulate a blinking sensation. The results showed that these researchers were successfully able classify intervals of blinking to minimize jittering that occurs during blinking during selection with eye gaze. This paper educated us on how an EEG data stream can be negatively impacted due to unwanted blinking artifacts. While we did not develop a trained machine learning model for classifying noise and intent artifacts, this paper solidified our decision to find software that would handle this for the NeuroGaze system. In initial pilots of the NeuroGaze system we did experience issues with jittering due to blinking due to this being handled for us in the Meta Quest Pro HMD. Future work, independent of the Meta Quest Pro HMD, could benefit from software like Blink [1], designed to manage noise potentially inferring with eye tracking data. This would allow us to explore different, more compatible, VR headsets.

Putze et al. [22] presents research closest to our latest version of the NeuroGaze input device. Interestingly, their selection device was not designed for use a 3D stereoscopic display, but rather in a 3D flat screen-based environment. This distinction is crucial, as it emphasizes the different challenges and

interaction dynamics present in less immersive settings. Their system, denoted *EEG+GAZE*, consists of Tobii X60 eye tracker with a sampler frequency of 60Hz and a BrainProducts 32 electrode EEG cap. Participants had 29 electrodes positioned respective of the 10-20 system at the following locations: Fp1, Fz, F3, F7, FT9, FC5, FC1, C3, T7, CP5, CP1, P3, Pz, P7, O1, Oz, O2, P4, CP6, CP2, Cz, C4, T8, FT10, FC6, FC2, F4, F8, FP2 and reference electrode positioned at Fz. EEG+GAZE used gaze to detect when a user is likely and unlikely to select an object. This is achieved by monitoring when a user is slowly moving their eyes towards an area of interest versus quickly scanning the screen. During the window where a user's gaze seems like they want to interact with an object, the EEG headset records their temporal window. To collect data to train the classifier for the eye gaze and EEG, participants were tasked with following key on a monitor with their eyes and in the moments where the objects speed increased and slowed down, the data coming from these two devices created a window of interest. The evaluation consisted of 10-fold cross validation for each participant individually and averaged the result. The data shows that their classifier produced a lower  $F_{0.2} - Score$  the lower the tolerance, measured in number of window and milliseconds. This suggests that their EYE+GAZE systems classifier had very limited false positive and thus more accurate classification for event-based evaluation scenes [25].

This literature review has shown our journey for determining the best possible design of the NeuroGaze system by breaking apart this new input device's subcomponents. VR controllers presenting us with the ray casting interaction metaphor and the physical strain problem. Eye gaze provided us with comparable saccade interaction methods, like Duo-Reticles, and evaluation with fixed points in a 3D environment for our evaluation of the system. Finally, an overview of the research done in BCI in 2D and 3D environments show us that it is possible to classify these variances in neuron voltage. Combining these elements, we get the NeuroGaze input device designed to challenge how efficiently, accurately, and cognitive ease with which BCIs can operate in virtual environments.

## CHAPTER THREE: SOFTWARE & SYSTEM DESIGN – NEUROGAZE

### 3.1 System Overview

NeuroGaze is an input device proof of concept (POC) specifically developed for selection in a VE. The objective of NeuroGaze is to empower users with a selection device that allows them to interact in VR in a new way to improve accuracy and efficiency when compared to traditional input devices, such as VR controllers. Our system uses eye trackers built into the Meta Quest Pro HMD to activate a *hover state* cue on objects in the scene they can interact with. When a user's eye gaze is broken by one of these interactable objects, the object slowly and continuously grows until it reaches its max scale. Conversely, when a user's eye gaze moves off an interactable object, the object will shrink at a slow continuous speed until it is returned to its original scale. The users eye gaze interacts with objects in the scene using the ray cast interaction metaphor through a white line renderer to represent the midpoint between the user's eyes at any moment. NeuroGaze uses the Emotiv EPOC X EEG headset for the EEG data stream and the EmotivBCI program for creating training profiles that collect EEG data, handle EEG noise sanitization, and EEG artifact classification. The Unity Game engine and Meta XR All in One SDK were used to complete the development of NeuroGaze, integrating the hardware components and software solutions to create a seamless and intuitive user experience within VE. This integration allows NeuroGaze to provide a hands-free and accurate method for interacting with and selecting objects in VR, showcasing improvement over conventional input devices in terms of user preference and interaction fidelity. The implementation of NeuroGaze represents a novel approach to VR interaction, leveraging the precision of eye tracking and the sophistication of EEG data analysis to challenge existing input devices. By utilizing the Emotiv EPOC X EEG headset and EmotivBCI software, NeuroGaze minimizes noise and classifies user intentions based on neural activity, demonstrating the potential of combining multiple biometric inputs for enhanced control within a VE.



Pilot studies were used to ideate and iterate over our software design and apparatus. These studies consisted of 8 people with little to no experience with VR systems. Our objective was to learn what drawbacks users felt towards the NeuroGaze system so we could identify them early in the development process. These were the biggest lessons learned:

1. Individuals with more hair must put their hair up in less comfortable positions to accommodate for the EEG node placement of the EEG headset and ergonomics of the EEG and VR headset.
2. Without the eye casting ray and the “growing and shrinking” metaphors, users have a very hard time telling which interactable they were looking at and could select.
3. One eye casting ray per eye were distracting for users and they expressed frustration. On occasions, each of the user’s eyes could be looking at different objects, causing double selections.
  - a. Averaging distance and forward vector between eyes and updating the ray to originate from this position was more intuitive and performant for users.
4. In our EEG training loop:
  - a. Giving a user a countdown well before starting the Emotiv training software gave users time to recall their unique thought and increased quality of EEG training data.
  - b. Allowing users to think of their own thought for selection leverages their unique experiences and generates EEG artifacts that are easier to classify for selection. Standardization of what users should think about (e.g crushing the object) decreased the quality of the users EEG training data and should be avoided.

- c. Completely train one mental command (e.g. *neutral state* or *shrink state*) before moving onto the next generates artifacts that are easier to classify and a solid EEG baseline is formed.
- d. Individuals who believed they were selecting the interactable object during training seemed to yield higher quality EEG data.

Throughout the development process, a user-centered design philosophy [14] was emphasized, ensuring that NeuroGaze not only advances the technological capabilities of VR interfaces but also addresses the practical needs and preferences of users. By focusing on ease of use, accessibility, and the reduction of physical exertion, NeuroGaze aims to make virtual interactions more enjoyable and less tiring, particularly for users who may find traditional input devices cumbersome or completely inaccessible. Active sensors from both the EPOC X and Quest Pro were used as the user is required to wear both headsets simultaneously. This input device was chosen to be multimodal to leverage the advantages of both devices. By decoupling the main input channel (EPOC X) from the secondary channel (eye gaze), we are hoping to reduce cognitive load [24] that would be required of these input channels individually. Using EEG or eye gaze alone can be problematic due to stimuli that might gain a user’s visual attention or cause unwanted artifacts in the EEG data stream. This would lead to forced error and reduce the usability of this input device. In using a multimodal approach, we are aiming to reduce error by with redundancy flags. One flag (via a *Hover State* from eye gaze) for intent and another flag to trigger selection (via *pull command* from EEG stream), given both flags are active. By increasing the number of input channels, we should increase recall rates [19] and more successfully selection. The specific combination of these modalities should be catered to the task needed to be performed [14].

The design of the NeuroGaze system included many constraints that challenged our initial concept during the ideation phase. From the start, the lack of ergonomic compatibility between an EEG headset and the Meta Quest Pro proved to be challenging. Three different EEG headsets (EPOC X, MUSE II,

and Insight II) were all tried during pilot studies to evaluate comfort and usability with the EPOC X ultimately being chosen for our final design for evaluation. We believe that the comfort lost by wearing both headsets at the same time will be compensated with the ability to interact with items completely independent of limbs that would cause discomfort from repetitive motions. Unlike NeuroGaze, the physical ergonomics of VR controllers require users to undergo repeated isotonic contractions that can be tiring, uncomfortable and frustrating to use over a duration of time. Similarly, the pinch gesture required from the Eye Gaze + Hand Gesture input device requires users to make isotonic contractions if they chose to raise their arm before the pinch gesture or isometric contractions by keeping their hands at waist level while performing the pinching gesture [30]. Either way, an opposition motion is required by opening and closing fingers to select objects. NeuroGaze does not require these types of flexions and only a rotation of the head and body is required, which the other two input devices also demand. Users who have physical limitations can potentially gain a sense of autonomy by using our system to interact with VEs without the intervention of the third party.

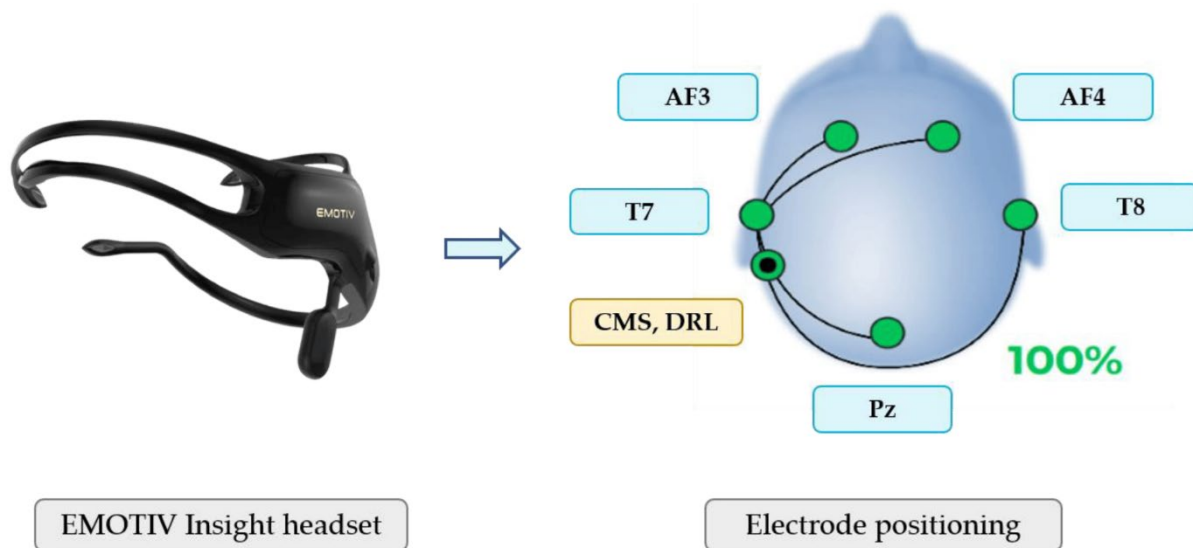
### **3.2 EEG Hardware**

When deciding which EEG headset to use for the NeuroGaze system, our immediate concern was ensuring we chose a headset that gave us a high-fidelity EEG stream that was budget efficient. We wanted to keep our budget in the \$1000 range or less due to this Thesis not being funded. Additionally, from an ergonomics perspective, we needed to ensure that the EEG headset could be worn underneath the Meta Quest Pro VR HMD. If possible, we also would prefer the electrodes to be in a different position than the position where the VR headset would be holding the user. Although we are limited by these two pieces of hardware not designed for one another, if we can reduce pressure points on the user's head, this would greatly increase comfort and reduce unnecessary artifacts from discomfort. Getting data off these headsets was also a factor we had to consider. How many channels do we need to access? How can we export EEG data and does the headset interface with any existing data collection and synthesis software? All these

unknowns needed to be investigated to find the most “out of the box” apparatus and software architecture for our POC. We reviewed many different EEG headsets, but the following were the three we narrowed down for the final design for the NeuroGaze input device.

### 3.2.1 Emotiv Insight II

Emotiv is a pioneer in the field of neuroscience with its development of high-quality, accessible EEG technology. Their products are used across the world for research, neuroeducation, and brain computer applications, focusing on producing comprehensive brain monitoring solutions. Emotiv’s commercial EEG headset was not only budget friendly but also would aid with tracking the quality of the EEG data we were collecting through the EmotivPRO and EmotivBCI programs. The Insight II model from Emotiv has 5 channels with 2 reference sensors, focusing on key areas of cognitive state monitoring. The polymer sensors are arranged according to the international 10-20 system and the location of the sensors are in the AF3, AF4, T7, T8 and Pz positions as seen in *Figure 2*.



*Figure 2: Emotiv Insight II (left) and electrode placement (right)*

*Source: Suárez, M. (2023)*

These sensor locations focus on the frontal and parietal areas which are important for cognitive and emotional insight. This headset has a sampling rate of up to 128Hz and connects to any computer that supports a Bluetooth 4.0 connection. We used this headset for a couple weeks, and while the contact quality was good, this headset was extremely uncomfortable to use for a longer period. This is partially because the Meta Quest Pro HMD distributes its weight to the front of the headset and the AF3 and AF4 electrodes are in this same position. Additionally, these two nodes were required to be a three-pronged contactor (See *Figure 3*) which was very uncomfortable and sometimes even painful to wear for a prolonged period while wearing the Meta Quest Pro. For this reason, we removed this headset from our apparatus and looked for alternatives for the NeuroGaze input device.



*Figure 3: Emotiv Insight II polymer sensors: three pronged (left), one pronged (right)*

### **3.2.2 Muse II**

Muse is another contributor to the neurotechnology space, offering devices that promote mental wellness through guided meditation and biofeedback. They offer the Muse II, a commercial EEG headband that is the more cost efficient of the three EEG devices we were interested in using. Additionally, this device is a hand band, not a headset, so the device did not have any nodes or prongs that could be

uncomfortable to wear. The EEG headband consists of 7 sensors (3 reference sensors, 2 forehead sensors, one grounding sensor behind each ear) and a heart monitor (See *Figure 4*). The Muse II is worn like a pair of glasses making it perfect when paired with the Meta Quest Pro HMD and although there are sensors on the front of the headset in the forehead area, because these sensors are flat, they did not cause discomfort.

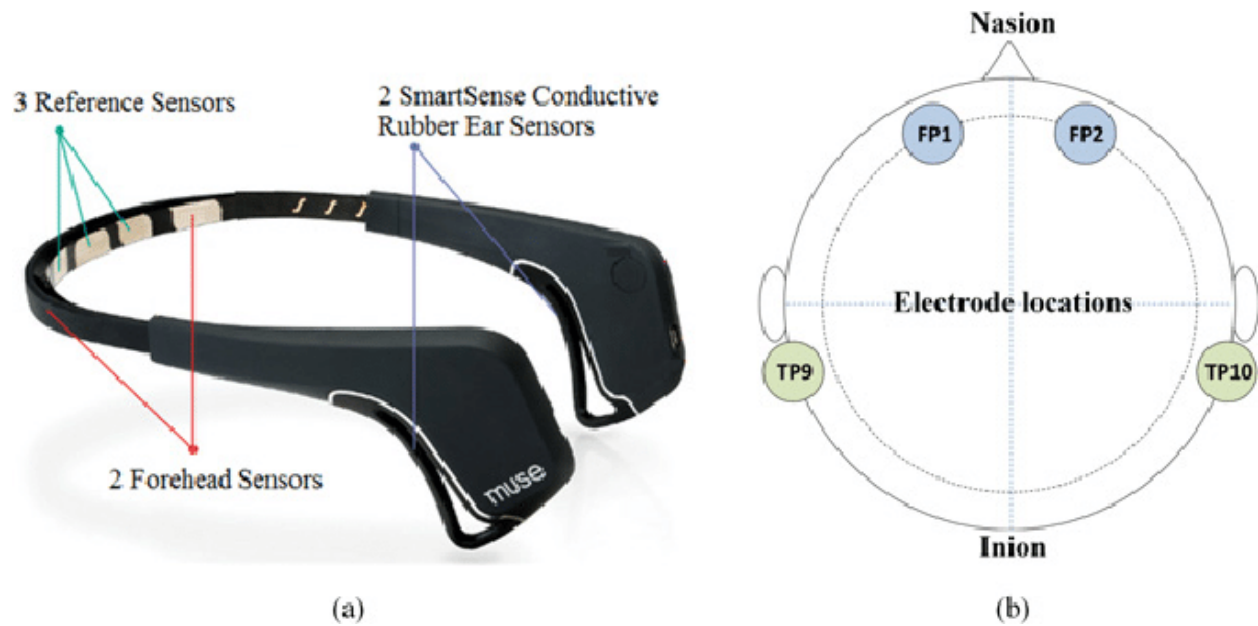


Figure 4: (a) Muse II EEG Headband with sensor locations, (b) electrode locations in International 10-20 system

Source: Liu, R. (2020)

To pull the stream and visualize the EEG data from the headset and store it, we attempted to use the open-source application Mind Monitor (See *Figure 5*). To classify data, we used the Edge Impulse software to import the raw data recorded from Mind Monitor and construct a neural network classifier. We collected data on thinking *right*, *left* and *neutral* in 5 second increments per thought. The data is stored as one CSV per session that Edge Impulse can use for an 80/20 training-testing split. Once the model trained on our data, the model performed inference with our testing split with a highest accuracy of

40%. After testing this pipeline further, we concluded that the noise artifacts impeded within the EEG data were clouding the data too much to classify intent with any level of confidence.

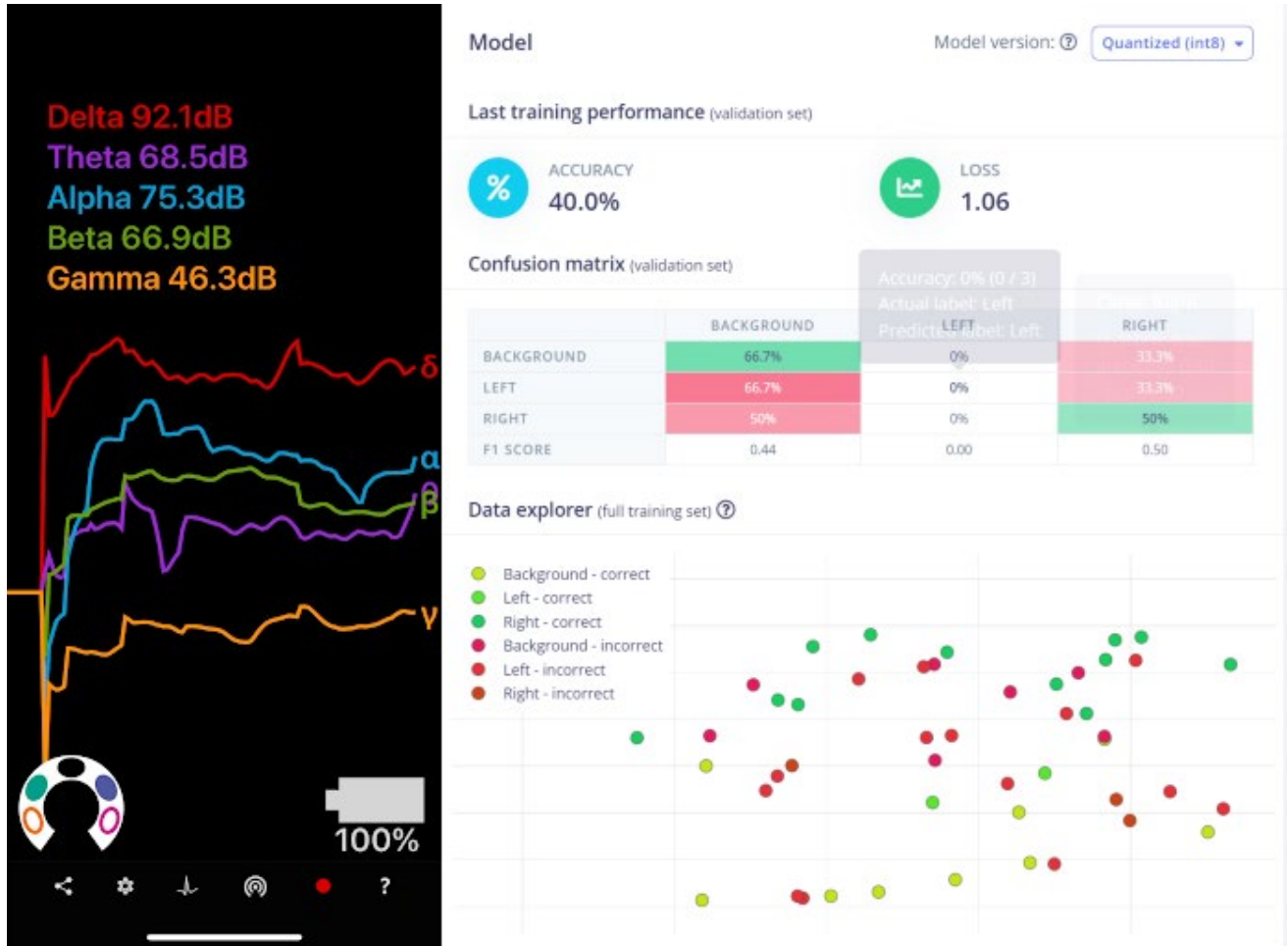


Figure 5: Mind Monitor visual of EEG data to be exported, (b) inference performed on Edge Impulse model trained on EEG data from Mind Monitor

The drawbacks of this headset are the limited channels we have access to for streaming EEG data, additionally the Muse SDK lacks any functionality for cleaning or classifying the data. If we selected this device, we would be required to collect ample data to train our own machine learning classifiers for identifying noise artifacts (e.g. eye blinks, random kinematic movements), and identifying when a user wants to interact with an object in the scene. Due to time restrictions and the POC nature of the NeuroGaze input device, we did not want to dedicate resources to developing machine learning classifiers and instead

wanted to focus on finding the best configuration and techniques to use. For this reason, we chose not to use this headset and looked towards less cost efficient Emotiv headsets that can handle our data processing pipeline.

### 3.2.3 Emotiv EPOC X

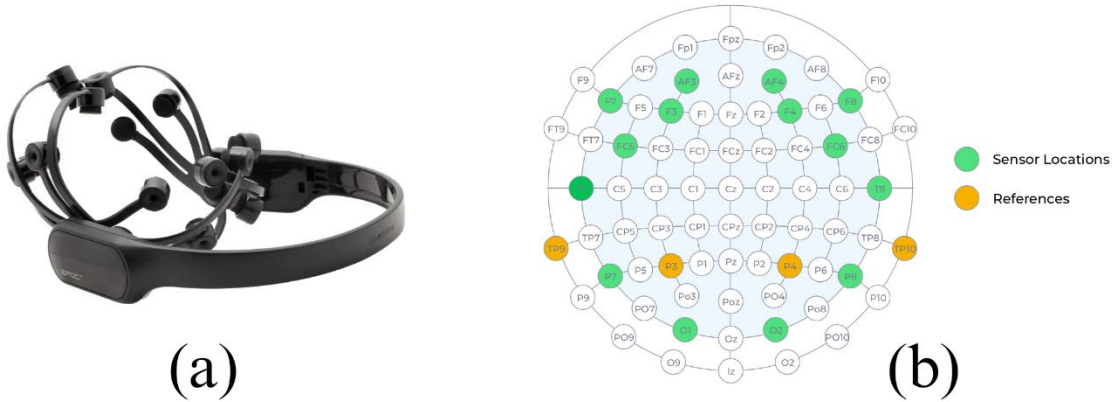


Figure 6: (a) Emotiv EPOC X EEG headset, (b) International 10-20 electrode placement for Emotiv EPOC X

When choosing the EEG headset for the NeuroGaze system, considering extended beyond technical specifications to consider factors such as user comfort, integration ease, and application relevance. The Emotiv EPOC X stands out for its comprehensive 10-20 system channel coverage (sensors: AF3, F7, F3, FC5, T7, P7, O1, O2, P8, T8, FC6, F4, F8, AF4, references: TP9, P3, P4, TP10) and an extensive software ecosystem (See Figure 6b). Although this headset is the most cost inefficient of the three candidates, we decided it was well worth it. Despite its functionality and integration possibility while being a commercial headset, the location of its electrode connections makes it ideal for compliance with the ergonomics of the Meta Quest Pro VR HMD. Additionally, the nodes are made of felt and saline solution can be added through the refillable sensor hole located on each sensor (See Figure 19). This design allows for maximum comfort, even at pressure points, and easy access to wetting dried out electrodes with saline solution even after the user has put on the NeuroGaze system. During evaluation, participants are told to think of a



motor command they would perform if they weren't stationary in a VE. With this in mind, we wanted to understand how effective the Emotiv EPOC X would be with classifying motor imagery and how internal motor acts are rehearsed in working memory [4]. Fakhruzzaman et al. [6] used the Emotiv EPOC X to attempt to classify motor imagery using BCI scenarios. Participants were told to imagine the motor action they would prefer during the following testing scenarios:

1. Left Hand Movement
2. Right Foot Movement
3. Simultaneous Left Hand and Right-Hand Movement
4. Simultaneous Left-Hand Movement and Head Nodding
5. Simultaneous Right Foot and Left Foot Movement
6. Simultaneous Right Foot Movement and Head Nodding

When attempting to classify the EEG data that correlate to these motor imageries, the Scenario 1 test results had a 76.67% success rate, Scenario 2 test results showed a 91.67% success rate, Scenario 3 yielded a 28.33% success rate, Scenario 4 get 13.33% success rate, Scenario 5 showed 60% success rate and Scenario 6 success rate was 53.33% success rate. The main take aways from this study is that the Emotiv EPOC X could not handle complex motor imagery classification so we would need to limit participants to a single, consistent thought (e.g thinking of selecting objects with their dominant hand). Additionally, the paper commented that while the classification for these tasks is not amazing, for a consumer grade product, the EPOC X is sufficient for POCs. For further investment into our research question, less commercial hardware should be used. Given our limitations, it was decided that for this Thesis, the Emotiv EPOC X would be sufficient for our use case and based on the results, further financial investment would be made.

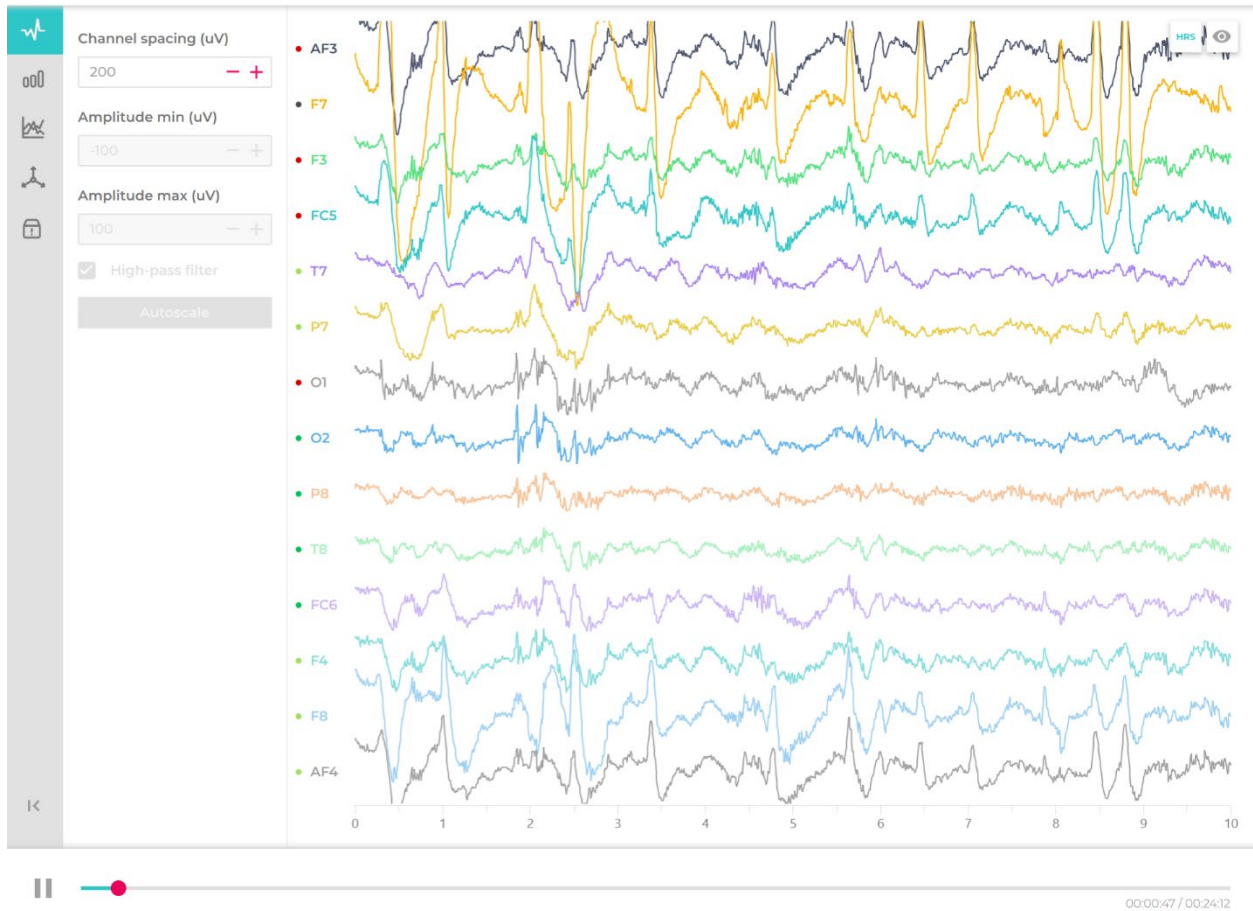
### 3.3 EEG Software

When deciding on which EEG software to use, we prioritize software that could integrate well with the Unity Game Engine. We needed the classification of user's intent to select an object to selection an object in the VE to have as little latency as possible. This is because eye tracking will be used for a hover state and if the classification is too delayed, the user could be looking at another object and accidentally select an object they didn't mean to. At this point, we had already decided that we were going to use the Emotiv EPOC X as our EEG device and Emotiv already has software built to stream, clean, and train the EEG data coming off their headsets. Using the EmotivBCI program, we were able to make *training profiles* to associate EEG data with a user and train the model on specific *mental commands*. The Emotiv Launcher handled authorization of our Unity program's access to these training profiles and all the data associated with it. With most of the software development efforts of building our own classification model alleviated, we could focus on integrating our Unity application with Emotiv's Cortex API.

#### 3.3.1 EmotivPRO

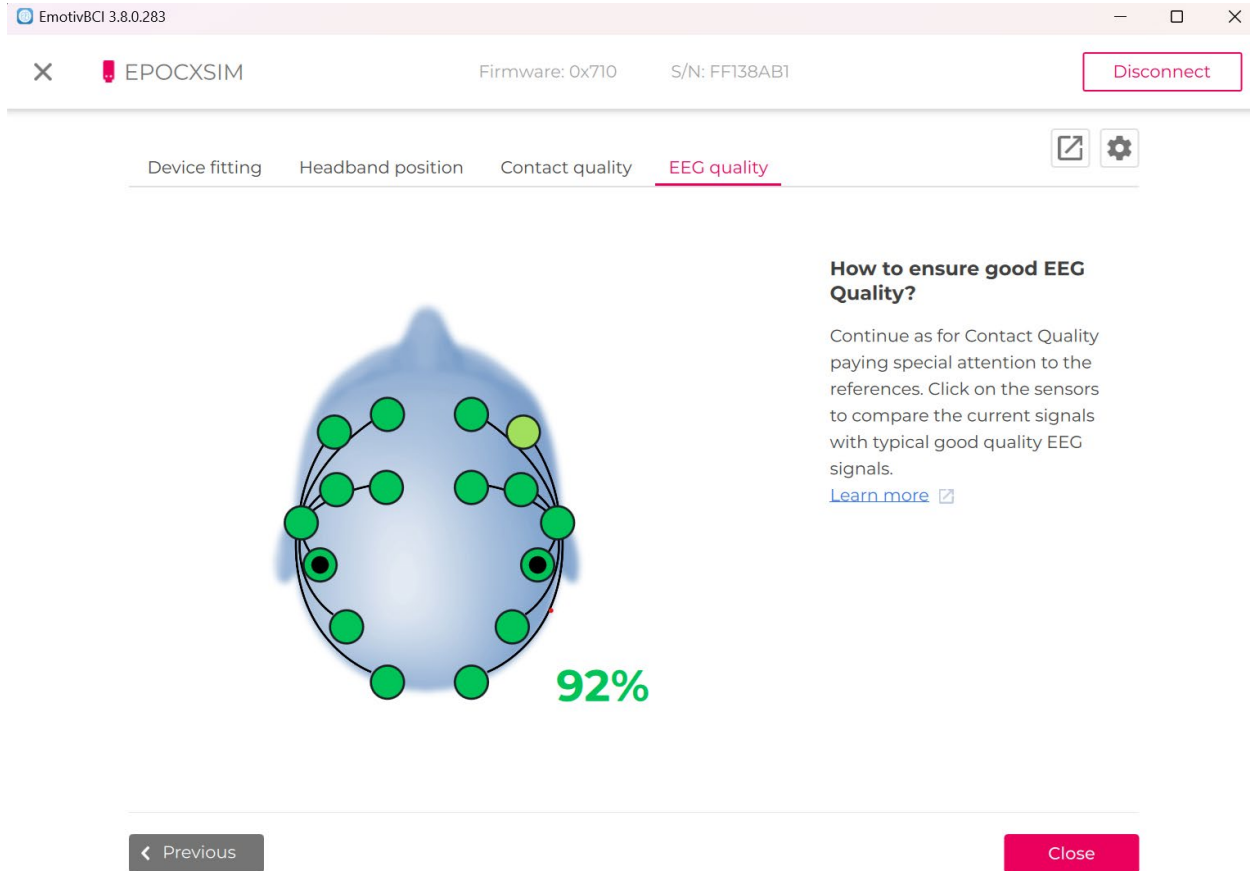
The EmotivPRO software handles the raw stream of EEG data coming from the EPOC X. This program also handles EEG preprocessing. All our raw EEG data is cleaned with a high pass filter using this program. All 14 channels on the headset can also be played back (See *Figure 7*). The raw stream is measured in microvolts converted directly from a 14-bit unsigned integer. The program has performance metric data that classifies and charts emotional states (e.g. Attention, Engagement, Excitement, Interest, Relaxation, Stress). We do not these performance metrics in the NeuroGaze system, but it could be interesting to investigate in future works. This program was critical in handling the initial stages of the software pipeline and allowed us to remove unwanted artifacts from our data like blinking and small kinematic movements Although this software does not give us direct access to training specific artifacts to

remove from our EEG data stream, the EmotivPRO software is great for POC type projects where little budget and short time are both major contributors.



*Figure 7: EmotivPRO data stream playback from Emotiv EPOC X*

### 3.3.2 EmotivBCI



*Figure 8: Emotiv BCI program – EEG Quality User Interface*

The EmotivBCI program is the main piece of software our Unity program interfaces with. This program handles training profiles for each of our participants with a unique identifier (See *Figure 9c*) that we can use to load any training profile into our Unity program. Before we begin training any of these profiles, we must check the contact and EEG Quality (EQ) currently being streamed from the headset. For each node, the Contact Quality (CQ) and EEG Score (ES) is calculated individually and is ranked on the sensor map as follows: black means very bad or no contact or EEG signal is detected from this node, red means the contact or ES is bad, orange means the contact or ES is average, green means the contact or ES is good (*Figure 9b*). CQ is just the measurement of impedance of the channel for that node or channel.

The CQ measure and the EQ are not the same, however the EQ can only be as good or less than the contact quality so this value should be 100% all the time to ensure the highest quality EEG stream. EQ is a bit fickle and achieving a consistent 100% EQ like CQ is not likely. ES a numeric score based on the following metrics:

1. Contact Quality (CQ): impedance measure indicating the quality of the electrical signal passing through the sensors and reference (0 or black – very bad, 1 or red – bad, 2 or orange – average, 4 or green – good)
2. ML Signal Quality (SQ): a machine learning algorithm trained on high quality EEG recordings collective by the Emotiv Research team, Data is accessed over 2 seconds increments (0 or black – very bad, 1 or red – bad, 3 or light green – good, 4 or green – great).
3. Signal Magnitude Quality (SMQ): a measure of a single’s amplitudes. Even if CQ and SQ are high, but the signal amplitude can still be low which would lead to an undetectable Fast Fourier Transform (FFT). (0 or black – very low, 1 or red – low, 4 or green – average).

The color corresponding to the minimum value out of these three metrics is displayed in the EmotivBCI program under the “EEG Quality” tab. (See *Figure 8*). EQ is represented as a percentage calculated by taking the minimum three ES of all available nodes, summing them up and dividing by the maximum ES of the same three nodes (value of 4 for CQ, SQ, or SMQ). The EQ can also be presented as an equation:

$$EQ = \left( \frac{\text{Lowest } ES_1 + \text{Lowest } ES_2 + \text{Lowest } ES_3}{\text{sum of max possible ES for 3 channels}} \right) \times 100 = \left( \frac{\text{Lowest } ES_1 + \text{Lowest } ES_2 + \text{Lowest } ES_3}{12} \right) \times 100$$

### **3.3.2.1 Training Data Collection & Mental Commands**

After confirming our contact quality and Overall EEG Quality is high, we begin training a profile on mental commands. A mental command is a recognized pattern in brain activity. When triggered, a

mental command allows for the setting of an event handler to respond; this forms the core of the NeuroGaze system. Although these mental commands have a set name in the EmotivBCI (*Neutral*, *Pull*, *Push*, *Lift*, *Drop*, etc.), if the same thought is consistently producing a recognizable pattern in brain activity, it does not matter if you're thinking of something different than what the mental command describes (e.g. thinking of making an item shrink when training the *pull* mental command). Before you can train other mental commands, you must start by training the *neutral* mental command. The *neutral* mental command is the baseline state that represents the brain activity when the mind is relaxed, at ease and not focusing on a particular thought.

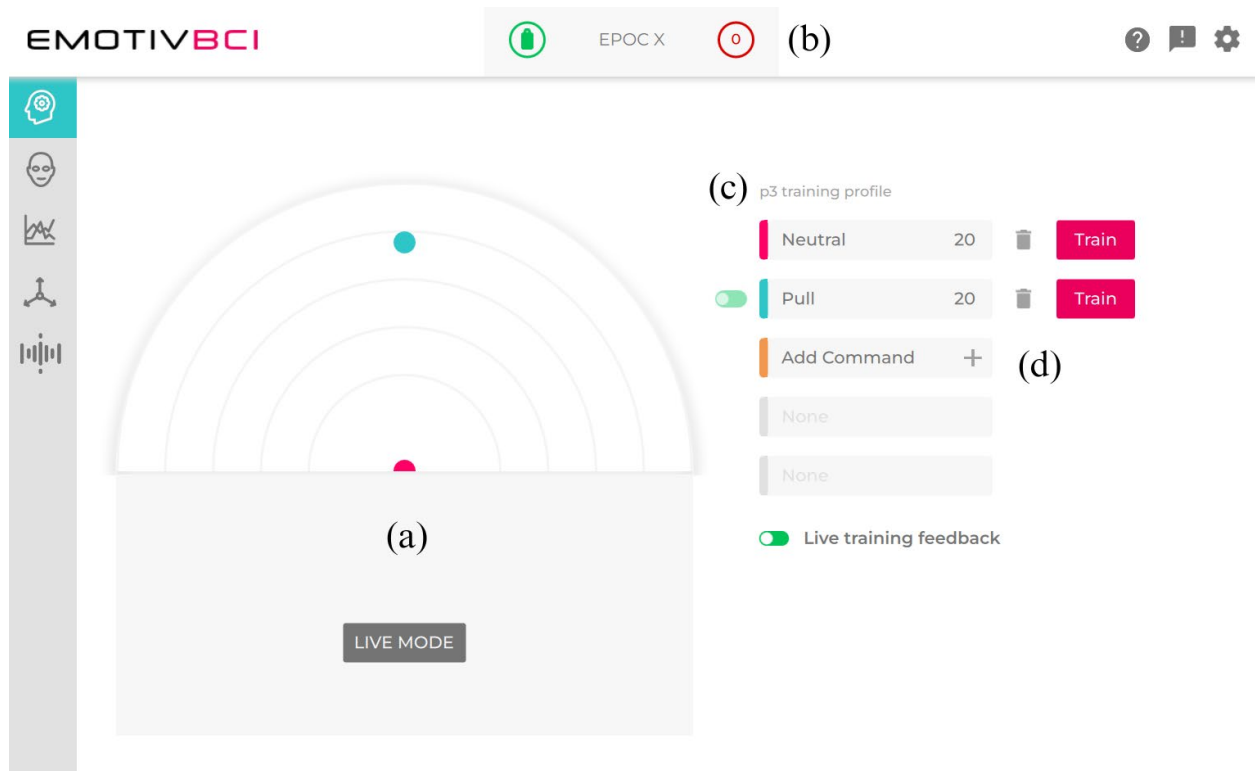
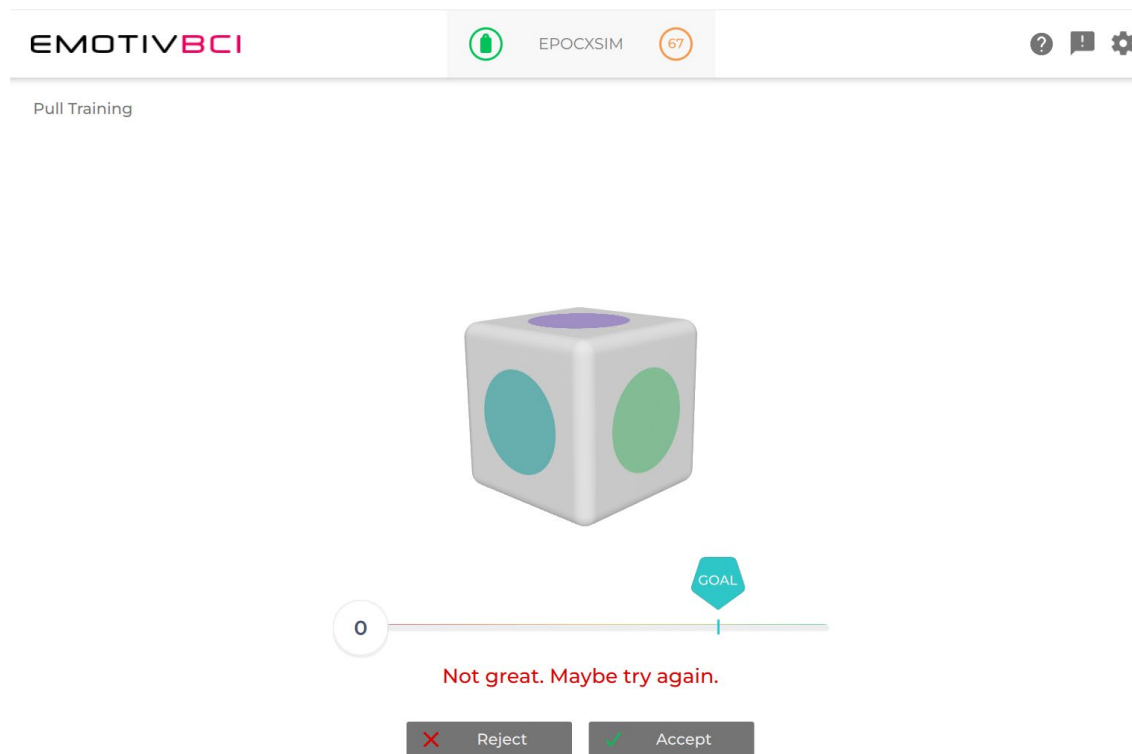


Figure 9: EmotivBCI Training Profile Menu, (a) Brain Space Diagram, (b) connected headset and EEG quality, (c) user training profile name, (d) training profile mental commands

When training a mental command, the goal is performing a thought that is both reproducible and separable from other mental commands. When training multiple mental commands, it becomes harder to distinguish between them. To alleviate this, Emotiv recommends linking each mental command to a

single and unique modality. An example of this could be visually seeing an object move up during a lift command training, hearing an object move towards you during a *pull* command training and gripping your fists during a drop command training. Additionally, if you have disposition towards a single modality, picking a unique thought within that modality can also be very effective (e.g. a musician linking a mental command to thinking about what sounds different notes make). Mental command training sessions last eight seconds after the *Train* button is clicked in which a training screen will display. At this point, an interactable objects will appear and begin performing the mental command you chose, and a timer decreases until the training time expires. After two training sessions, the EmotivBCI application provides feedback on how good the training was on a scale from 1-100 based on previous training sessions. After a session, you will see a number representing how good the session was with a goal of 75 out of 100. At this point, you can accept the training or reject it and try again (See *Figure 10*).



*Figure 10: EmotivBCI Training User Interface*

During the NeuroGaze evaluation, only training sessions with a value of 75 or higher were accepted. Additionally, each mental command was trained for 20 high quality training sessions. Due to the nature of the evaluation, we only needed two mental commands: *neutral* and *pull*. The *neutral* state is represented by the user's mind when it is calm and wondering, the user does not want to select an item during this mental state. The *pull* mental command is used to select items of interest (objects that have met their eye gaze) in the scene. Users were prompted to think about a particular action and thought of their choosing. Based on the research done by the Emotiv Research team, we believed it would be unwise to attempt to standardize these thoughts and instead leverage the unique experiences of each participant and let them choose a thought that felt most comfortable and familiar to them. With mental commands trained, we can now provide the Unity game engine with the user's unique training profile to trigger events in the scene depending on the command sent to Unity via the Cortex API.

### 3.3.3 Cortex API

To access training profile and mental commands from the EmotivBCI software, we needed to use the Cortex API from Emotiv to integrate with Unity. An EmotivID and paid License is required to create Cortex Apps. Cortex Apps are linked to your EmotivID and it's how both you and Emotiv can keep track of projects that have access to your data. Once you have created a new Cortex App, you will be presented with a *Client ID* and *Secret ID* which you will need to provide to the EmotivSDK and approve the third-party application for EEG data to start flowing to Unity.

## 3.4 NeuroGaze Design Architecture

The architecture of the NeuroGaze software design is split into two main sections: the Training Loop for creating and training profile for the EmotivBCI program and the Selection Loop for segmenting and classifying mental commands from the EEG stream. At a high level, the NeuroGaze input device pipeline is as follows:



1. Users create a new training profile and train the *neutral* and *pull* commands.
2. Using an EmotivID, a new Cortex App is created, and a new Client ID and Secret ID are generated.
3. The Client ID, Secret ID, and CortexApp name and unique training profile name are set in the MentalCommands and Config C# scripts.
4. The requestAccess API is called from Unity to Cortex and the Unity application is accepted via the Emotiv Launcher.
5. Once access is granted, the EPOC X connects to the PC running Unity via Bluetooth.
6. The controlDevice API with the “refresh” command is called from Unity to start scanning for headsets every frame.
7. The queryHeadsets API is called to display available Emotiv headsets to connect to.
8. The controlDevice API with “connect” command specifies which headset from the queried list the Unity application wants to connect to.
9. The Authorize API is called to get a Cortex token.
10. The createSession API is called to open a new session for BCI streaming.
11. Call queryProfile API to get list of training profiles associated with Emotiv ID
12. Load the users training profile by calling LoadProfile with the user’s unique profile name.
13. Subscribe to data stream of Epoc X using SubscribeData.
14. Every frame, call GetMentalCommand from created instance of MentalCommands.
15. Every frame, check if eye gaze is intersecting with a selectable object and mental command is *pull*.
  - a. If both are true, select object.
  - b. If either is false, do nothing.

### 3.4.1 Training Loop

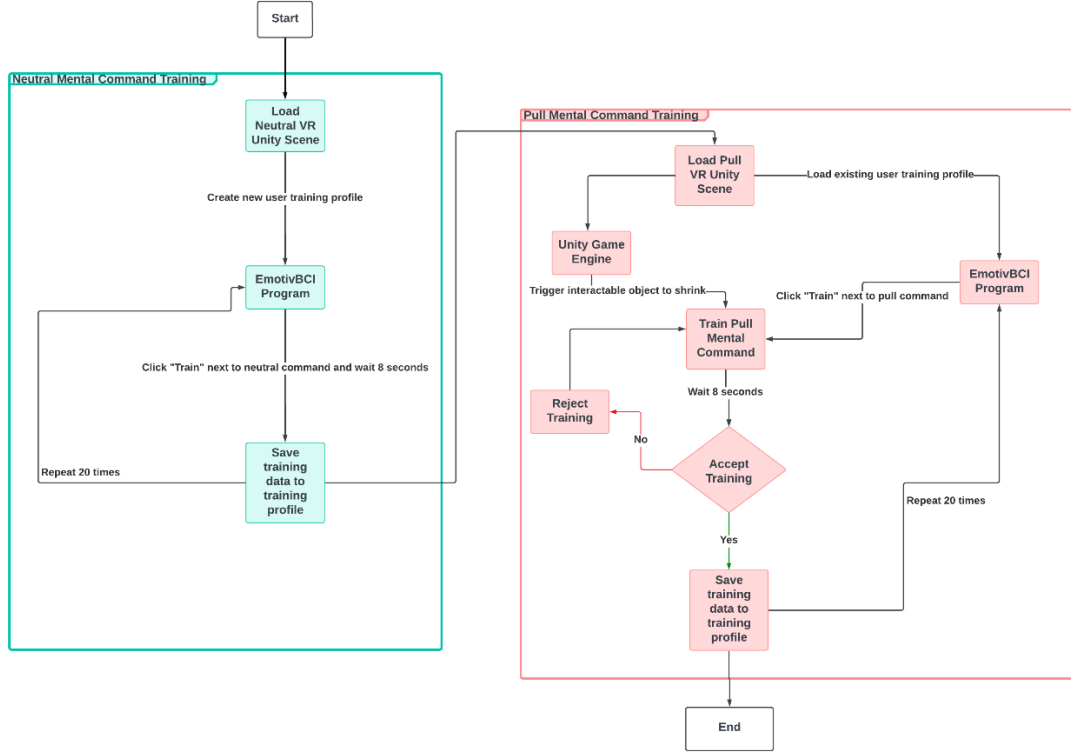


Figure 11: Training Loop System Architecture Diagram

To train a new training profile, we first create a new training profile in the EmotivBCI program. Then we load users into the Neutral Command Unity Scene and users are prompted to simply sit and look around the scene. At this moment, we click the *Train* button next to the *neutral* mental command. This repeats 20 times to establish a solid baseline for the training profile. Next, we train the *pull* mental command that will be used in the evaluations scene to select an interactable object. Users are loaded into the Pull Command Unity Scene. This scene contains a single red interactable object that users will be attempting to select. Using the training profile already trained on the *neutral* mental command, we click the *Train* button next to the *pull* mental command. Immediately after, we click the *Start Shrinking* button in the Unity program to give the illusion to users that they are selecting the interactable object. This is *Wizard of Oz* approach is done to get the most accurate EEG stream possible for when a user wants to select

an object. When a training round has completed, the EmotivBCI program presents us with the quality of the training, and we can either accept it or reject the training and it will not be added to the users training profile. This training is also done for 20 successful rounds of training to ensure a distinct mental command for *pull*.

### 3.4.2 Selection Loop

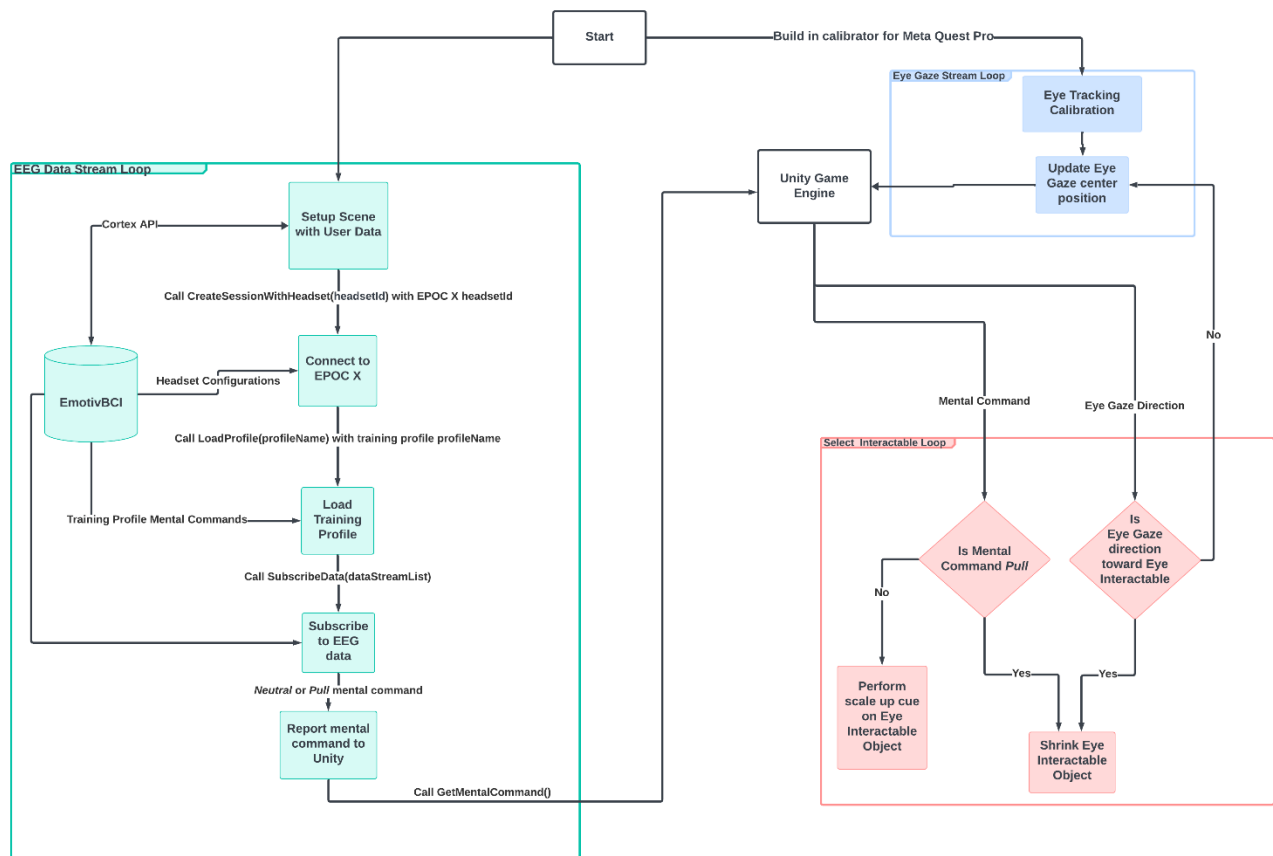


Figure 12: Selection Loop System Architecture Diagram

The selection loop (See Figure 12) handles the exchange of data between the EPOC X headset, the EmotivBCI program and the Unity Game Engine. Once the Meta Quest Pro eye trackers have been calibrated and the Unity Game Engine has been configured (See *Mental Commands Manager*), the program will create a connection between the EmotivBCI program and the EPOC X, load the training profile

(See *Training Profile Loop*) from EmotivBCI, and subscribe to the EEG data stream from EmotivBCI. Every frame (approximately 16 milliseconds), the `GetMentalCommand` method is ran and provides the Unity Scene with either the *neutral* or *pull* mental command. The direction of the user's eye gaze is also being recorded every frame to check if their gaze is met with any interactable object. If it is, the interactable object will grow to a fixed scale to provide users with visual feedback. Once their gaze leaves the object, it will return to its original scale. If the users eye gaze meets and interactable object and the mental command being classified and returned from the EmotivBCI program is *pull*, the interactable object shrinks until and disappears (similarly to how the object shrinks during the training loop) to show the user they have selected that object.

### 3.4.3 Unity Game Engine

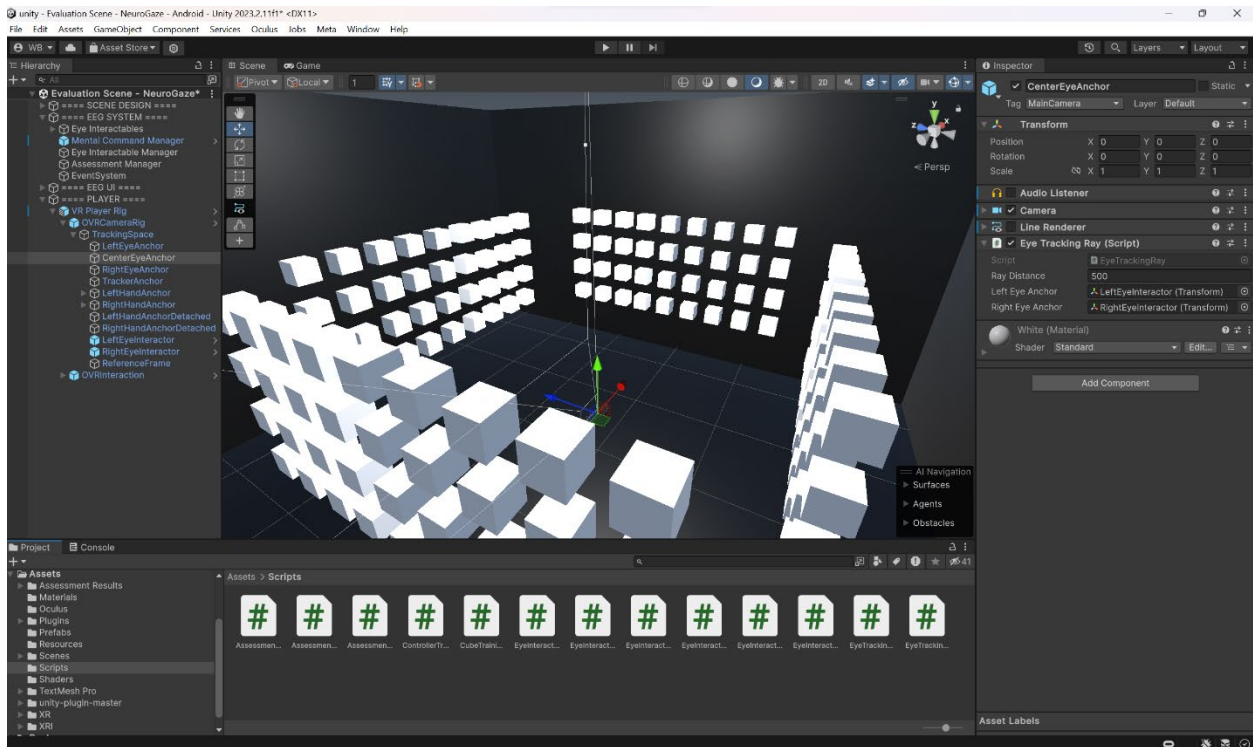
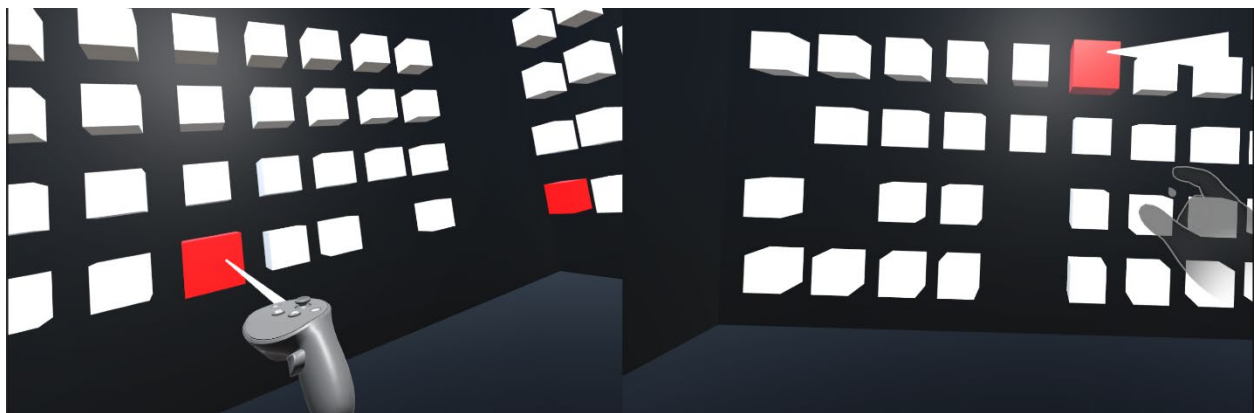


Figure 13: Example Unity Scene - NeuroGaze

The Unity Game Engine played a pivotal role in the development of the NeuroGaze system. Unity provided us with a platform to build our VR application on to test the NeuroGaze system in a VE. Unity's Game Object and Prefab components allowed us to configure structures to handle replicable logic for interaction and assessment management. The integration of NeuroGaze with Unity allowed us to use the Meta XR All in One SDK to create a VR player rig and interactable objects that the user can select while in VR. With the use of C# scripts, we were able to program logic for handling eye tracking, hand gestures, selection, and a gameplay loop.

#### **3.4.3.1 Scenes**

Scenes in Unity are where the evaluation gameplay content lives. In the NeuroGaze Unity project, scenes were used to separate parts of the training and evaluation. We had five scenes: Training Scene – Neutral Mental Command, Training Scene – Pull Mental Command, Evaluation – NeuroGaze, Evaluation – Eye Gaze combined with Hand Gesture, Evaluation – VR Controllers (See *Figure 14*). All these scenes consist of a bare black room, lit with point lights, to ensure there were no unnecessary artifacts produced in the EEG data from an overstimulating design. The *neutral* command training scene consist of a single wall with white interactable objects that the users can hover on using their eye gaze.



*Figure 14: Evaluation Scenes – VR Controllers (left), Eye Gaze combined with Hand Gestures (right)*

The *pull* command training scene is identical in appearance and functionality to the *neutral* command training scene, except it has a single red interactable in the middle that acts as a focus point for users to train their brain activity for the *pull* command. The evaluation scene for all three input devices being evaluated are the exact same. The only notable difference in the scene is what represents the player's hand (VR controllers or synthetic hands) and where the ray cast originates from (VR Controller or midpoint between the users' eyes). Unity scenes provided us with a VE in which to test input devices against each other in an intuitive and useful way.

#### **3.4.3.2 VR Player Rig**

Using the Meta XR All in One SDK imported into the Unity project, we were able to configure a VR rig that handles tracking and representing the user's eyes, hands and controllers in the VE. The VR rig consists of an *OVRCameraRig* game object that contains the main VR camera and *Tracking Space* game object. This Tracking Space contains the *LeftEyeInteractor* and *RightEyeInteractor* game objects which represent the position of the user's eyes in the scene (World Space) using the *OVREyeGaze* C# script. The *OVREyeGaze* script works by requesting permission from the Meta Quest Pro HMD for its eye tracking data, then every frame eye tracking data is retrieved and processed using *GetEyeGazeState* and a predefined *ConfidenceThreshold*. The transform of the *LeftEyeInteractor* and *RightEyeInteractor* are changed to match the appropriate position and rotation users should expect their eye to be in the VE.

```

private void Update()
{
    Vector3 eyesCenter = (leftEyeAnchor.position + rightEyeAnchor.position) * 0.5f; // Average the left and right eye anchors to find the midpoint
    Vector3 forwardDirection = (leftEyeAnchor.forward + rightEyeAnchor.forward) * 0.5f; // Average the forward direction of both eyes
    Ray ray = new Ray(eyesCenter, forwardDirection);
    RaycastHit hit;
    bool isHit = Physics.Raycast(ray, out hit, rayDistance);

    // Check the users eye gaze has hit an object
    if (isHit)
    {
        EyeInteractable eyeInteractable = hit.collider.GetComponent<EyeInteractable>();

        // Check if the users eye gaze hit an item we can interact with (select)
        if (eyeInteractable)
        {
            if (lastEyeInteractable != eyeInteractable)
            {
                if (lastEyeInteractable != null)
                {
                    lastEyeInteractable.Hover(false); // If previous interactable object was in a hover state, set this state to false
                }
                lastEyeInteractable = eyeInteractable;
            }
            eyeInteractable.Hover(true); // Enlargen or set this cubes "hover state" to true to let users know that can select it
        }
        else if (lastEyeInteractable != null)
        {
            lastEyeInteractable.Hover(false); // If previous interactable object was in a hover state, set this state to false
            lastEyeInteractable = null;
        }
    }
    else
    {
        if (lastEyeInteractable != null)
        {
            lastEyeInteractable.Hover(false); // If previous interactable object was in a hover state, set this state to false
            lastEyeInteractable = null;
        }
    }

    // Update the LineRenderer to represent the ray deriving from the users eye
    lineRenderer.SetPosition(0, eyesCenter);
    lineRenderer.SetPosition(1, eyesCenter + forwardDirection * rayDistance);
}

```

Figure 15: *EyeTrackingRay* C# script source code for *NeuroGaze* Input Device

Using these Eye Interactors, we have written a script called *EyeTrackingRay* (See Figure 15) that has its logic update every frame (updates at approximately 60 frames per second). This script calculates the midpoint between two eye interactors and the forward vector. Using this position vector, a RayCast is projected from the midpoint of the user's eyes and a check is performed to see what the object the user looked at was. If it was in object the user can interact with, the *EyeInteractable*, slowly grows to a fixed scale to signify to users that it is in a *hover state*. If the user makes eye contact with another *EyeInteractable* or non-*EyeInteractable*, the previous object the user looked it with return to its original scale and it will be out of its *hover state*. A Line Renderer component is also updated every frame from the user's eyes to 500 meters in the forward vector direction to represent where the user is looking. The

*EyeTrackingRay* script is used to trigger the hover state on *EyeInteractable* in the NeuroGaze and Eye + Hand Tracking input methods.

### **3.4.3.3 Eye Interactable**

The Eye Interactable game objects are represented by interactable objects in the Unity scene. They are the only objects users can select in the scene. Each Eye Interactable game object in the scene has the *EyeInteractable* script (See *Figure 16*) attached to it which interfaces with the *EyeTrackingRay* and *MentalCommandsManager* scripts. These objects have two states: a hover state set to true, and a hover state set to false. When the objects state is set to true, its scale will slowly grow to a max of 1.28x the objects original scale (*minimum scale:  $0.18m^3$ , maximum scale:  $0.2304m^3$* ). Similarly, if the hover state is false, the object will slowly shrink from its current scale to its original scale. When an Eye Interactor's hover state is set to true and the mental command received from is *pull*, further interaction with this object is disabled and the object is shrunk and destroyed from the scene. The Eye Interactable object knows what mental command is currently being classified from the EEG data through a reference to the *MentalCommandsManager* Instance which has a public method *CurrentMentalCommand* that scripts in our Unity project can access. During the assessment of each input device, 12 of these Eye Interactables will turn red and users must select as them as quickly and accurately as possible.



```

private void Update()
{
    string mentalCommand = EyeInteractableManager.Instance.CurrentMentalCommand; // Reference to EyeInteractableManager Instance

    // Check hover state and current mental command
    if (isHovered && mentalCommand == "pull")
    {
        // Set flags to select and destroy cube, stop cube from being interacted with
        shouldShrink = true;
        isBeingPulled = true;
    }
    else
    {
        if (isBeingPulled)
        {
            transform.localScale = originalScale;
            isBeingPulled = false;
        }
    }

    // Check mental command and hover state triggers
    if (shouldShrink)
    {
        ShrinkAndDestroy();
    }
    else if (isHovered)
    {
        ScaleUp(); // Change interactable scale to show user they are looking at it
    }
    else
    {
        ScaleDown(); // Change interactable scale to show user they are not looking at it
    }
}

```

*Figure 16: EyeInteractable C# source code for NeuroGaze Input Device*

#### 3.4.3.4 Mental Commands Manager

```
public class MentalCommands : MonoBehaviour
{
    EmotivUnityItf _emotivUnityItf = new EmotivUnityItf();
    bool mentalCmdRcvd = false;
    string mentalCommand;
    List<string> dataStreamList = new List<string>() { DataStreamName.MentalCommands, DataStreamName.SysEvents };
    string clientId = "00000000-0000-0000-0000-000000000000";
    string clientSecret = "00000000-0000-0000-0000-000000000000";
    string appName = "MSI3";
    public string profileName = "wanyeaPilot";
    public string headsetId = "EPOCX-E50208B2";

    // Delegate for mental command changes
    public delegate void OnMentalCommandChanged(string newCommand);
    public event OnMentalCommandChanged MentalCommandChanged;

    @ Unity Message | 0 references | Wanyea Barbel, 13 days ago | 1 author, 1 change
    void Start()
    {
        _emotivUnityItf.Init(clientId,clientSecret,appName);
        _emotivUnityItf.Start();
        DataManager.Instance.ScanHeadsets();
    }

    @ Unity Message | 0 references | Wanyea Barbel, 13 days ago | 1 author, 1 change
    private void OnGUI()
    {
        if (Event.current.Equals(Event.KeyboardEvent("1")))
        {
            try
            {
                _emotivUnityItf.CreateSessionWithHeadset(headsetId);
                _emotivUnityItf.LoadProfile(profileName);
                _emotivUnityItf.SubscribeData(dataStreamList);
                mentalCmdRcvd = true;
            } catch {
                UnityEngine.Debug.Log("Creating Session with: " + headsetId);
            }
        }
    }
}
```

Figure 17: Mental Commands C# script - Connecting to headset and subscribing to data stream (clientId and clientSecret encrypted)

The core component to accessing the training profile and EEG data collected in the EmotivBCI program is the Mental Commands Manager. This game object is configured with the *MentalCommands* script (See *Figure 17*) which utilizes the Cortex API to retrieve EEG data from the Emotiv EPOC X (See *Figure 18*). *MentalCommands* is configured with the App Name, Client ID and Client Secret generated when you create a new Cortex App. Additionally, the unique name of the training profile created in the EmotivBCI program, and the headset ID found on the EPOC X are configured in this script. The NeuroGaze system set up so a researcher can start the Unity scene and click *I* on the keyboard to handle all the Emotiv logic and start reading the EEG stream from the headset. When the program begins, a new instance of *EmotivUnityItf* is initialized with the user credentials. If the user's profile has a valid Emotiv

license and the Unity application has been approved to access Emotiv data (via the Emotiv Launcher), the program will begin scanning for Emotiv headsets. Then, if the *headsetId* matches a headset found during the scan, a connection to the headset will be established with the *CreateSessionWithHeadset* method. Then, the *LoadProfile* method will be called with the *profileName*. If a training profile associated with the *clientId* and *clientSecret* is found an EEG data stream will start and mental commands can be extracted from the EmotivBCI program. Accessing these mental commands is achieved by calling the *GetMentalCommand* method from the instance of *EmotivUnityIft* and a string representing this mental command will be returned.

```
void Update()
{
    if (mentalCmdRcvd)
    {
        string currentCommand = _emotivUnityIft.mentalCmdIs();

        if (currentCommand != lastMentalCommand)
        {
            Debug.Log($"The current mental command is: {mentalCommand}");
            mentalCommand = currentCommand;
            lastMentalCommand = currentCommand;

            // Trigger the event
            MentalCommandChanged?.Invoke(mentalCommand);
        }
    }
}

1 reference | Wanyea Barbel, 13 days ago | 1 author, 1 change
public string GetMentalCommand()
{
    return mentalCommand;
}
```

Figure 18: Mental Commands C# script – Fetching current mental command via Cortex API

The Mental Commands Manager is referenced by each Eye Interactable every frame to check what the users current mental command is. By creating one instance of this object, we can send data about

the EPOC X to any part of our Unity program without the need to configure an EEG stream per component.

### 3.4.3.5 Interactable Manager

The Interactable Manager checks the state of each Eye Interactable in the scene and reports their status to the Assessment Manager. Additionally, this component is responsible for the assessment handoff to the Assessment Manager to collect and store evaluation data. Each Eye Interactable is a child of one of 4 parent game objects: *leftWall*, *rightWall*, *frontWall* or *backWall*. When the Interactable Manager starts the assessment, 4 of the child game objects on each wall will randomly turn red (See *Figure 19*).

```
IEnumerator ChangeRandomCubesColor(GameObject parentObject)
{
    if (parentObject == null)
    {
        Debug.LogError("Parent object is not assigned!");
        yield break;
    }

    // Get all child objects from parent
    Transform[] children = parentObject.GetComponentsInChildren<Transform>();

    // Shuffle the array
    System.Random rng = new System.Random();
    int n = children.Length;
    while (n > 1)
    {
        n--;
        int k = rng.Next(n + 1);
        Transform value = children[k];
        children[k] = children[n];
        children[n] = value;
    }

    // Change the color of 3 cubes per wall to red
    int cubesColored = 0;
    foreach (Transform child in children)
    {
        if (child != parentObject.transform && cubesColored < targetsPerWall)
        {
            Renderer renderer = child.GetComponent<Renderer>();
            if (renderer != null)
            {
                renderer.material.color = Color.red;
                child.gameObject.tag = "RedCube"; // Tag the cube as RedCube
                cubesColored++;
            }
        }
    }
}
```

Figure 19: Interactable Manager C# script – Changing interactable colors when assessment has begun

At this moment, the Assessment Manager will begin monitoring the Eye Interactables for how many red interactable objects have been deleted, how many white interactable objects have been deleted and how many complete misses have been made.

#### ***3.4.3.6 Assessment Manager***

The Assessment Manager oversees all the Eye Interactables when the Unity scene is in *assessment mode*. During this mode, 12 Eye Interactables will turn red as a cue to inform which objects, they should be selecting. The Assessment Manager keeps track of how many times the user attempted to select an object and missed, how many times they selected the incorrect object and how long it took for the user to successfully select all the correct objects in the scene. These values are stored until the assessment is over and then they are exported as a CSV. A unique participant id is set by the evaluator and this id is included in the exported CSV file. This logic is applied to all three select devices to give evaluators an easy and intuitive way to run the same assessment on any input device across users.

## CHAPTER FOUR: USER STUDY

### 4.1 Experimental Design

A user study was conducted using the NeuroGaze, Eye Gaze + Hand Gesture, and VR controller input devices. When users are presented with an efficiency-accuracy selection task, we want to determine which input device yield the lowest task completion time and error count. User sentiments are also recorded using NASA-TLX surveys and a Post Evaluation survey to understand the cognitive load and preference for each input device. The study was performed with a sample size of  $n = 20$  participants gathered through local university student and staff. Participants were only eligible to participate in the study if they are 18+, have 20/20 vision or corrected to normal vision and hearing, proficient in English, have no previous history of simulator sickness and can extend both arms and use hands. The sample size consisted of 12 participants who identified as male and 8 participants who identified as female. Age ranges consisted of 8 people between 18-23, 9 people between 24-29, and 3 people between 30-35. Participants were asked to rank their experience with VR, AR and VR video games (see *Appendix B.1*) on a Likert point scale of 1 (no experience) to 5 (very experienced). Participants were also asked to complete a NASA-TLX survey for each input device following the evaluation of each device (See *Appendix B.2*) and a Post Evaluation Survey (See *Appendix B.3*) to gain overall user sentiment about the experiment and input devices holistically.

The design of the NeuroGaze input device was crafted in accordance with the type of evaluation we wanted to perform. We wanted to leverage the closed loop control system from the NeuroGaze input device to increase usability and decrease cognitive load during use. To achieve this, we used a *grow and shrink* scale cue to denote when users can select an interactable object. Additionally, the eye ray casting metaphor was used to explicitly show users where their eye gaze is so they can adjust their motor control appropriately. When the evaluation begins, the interactable objects the user should be selecting turn red,

the rest stay white. The interactable objects do not move position in space and only change in scale when a user’s eye gaze meets the object. This decision was made to limit the amount of noise users would create in their EEG data as a result of needing to make quick and jarring motions to keep track of moving objects. If we were able to classify these artifacts more accurately, future work could involve evaluating NeuroGaze in dense scenes with moving selectable objects. By keeping objects stationary, we can also evaluate all three input devices in accordance with Fitts Law [5]. Fitts Law describes performance of motor actions and the time it takes to make these movement as defined by the following formula:

$$MT = a + b \log_2 \left( \frac{2D}{W} \right)$$

*MT is movement time,  $a$  and  $b$  are constants,  $D$  is distance to target and  $W$  is target size.*

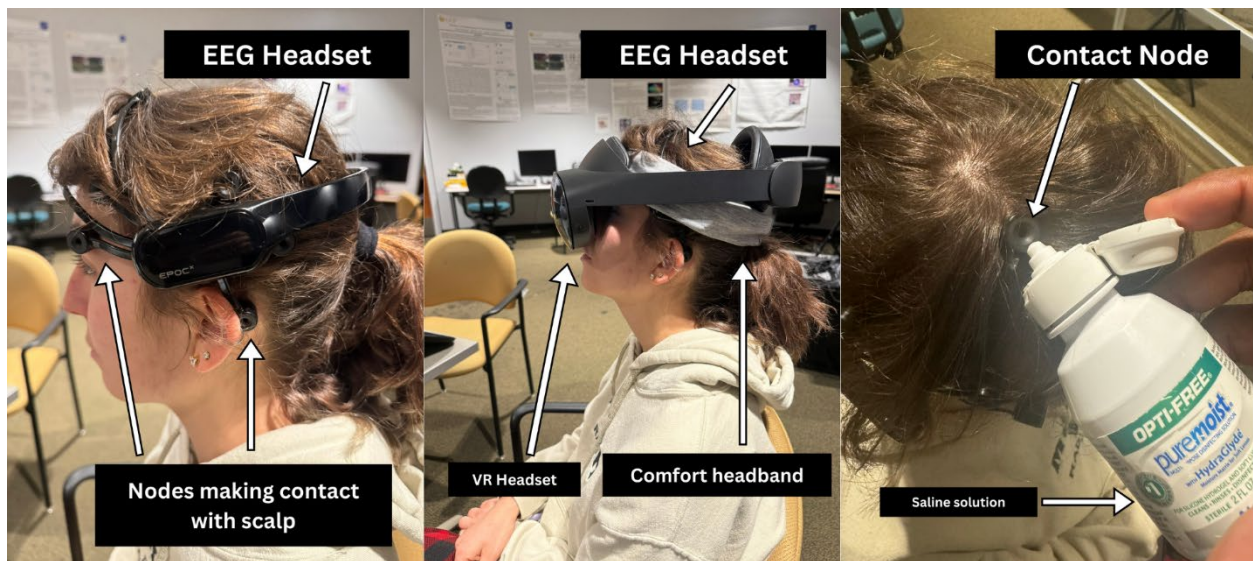
The metrics we chose to evaluate are completion task time and number of errors. To give every input device a chance at low movement and competition times, the distance between the user and each interactable object is approximately 2 meters and the size of each interactable object is  $0.18m^3$  when its not in hover state and  $0.23m^3$  when it is in hover state. We understand that when evaluating both speed and accuracy it is important to consider stimulus-response compatibility [8;14] so using the ray casting metaphor and size-based cues ensure interaction with the scene is natural, intuitive, and intentional. All three input devices are evaluated identically, and we predicted a learning curve may be present, especially with selection in VR. To mitigate this, each input is evaluated over three rounds to give users time to become familiar with the input device. Additionally, improved performance across input devices due to the learning curve is addressed by randomizing the order in which a single participant is evaluated on the input devices.

The NeuroGaze design limitations described prior lead us to believe that users, especially with prior VR experience, will have the highest task completion time with the controllers. However, we also

predict that users will make the least amount of system error with NeuroGaze when compared to the other two input devices due to specific motor imagery required to trigger a selection as the described in the system design. Besides comfort, we predict the cognitive load experienced from users will be the lowest with the NeuroGaze system besides in the Temporal or Mental Demand subscales. Ultimately, we are looking to evaluate usability of NeuroGaze against the other input devices given the limitations and scope of this Thesis.

#### 4.1.1 Materials & Apparatus

The evaluation scenes were built in Unity and ran on the Meta Quest Pro connected to a Windows 11 laptop (via Meta Link Cable) equipped with an Intel Core i9-13950HX CPU, an NVIDIA GeForce RTX 4070 GPU, 32 Gigabytes (GB) of RAM. The EmotivBCI program is also ran on this computer to collect EEG training profile data used by the Unity evaluation scene. The user was equipped with the Emotiv EPOC X HMD followed by the Meta Quest Pro HMD and two Meta Quest controllers (See *Figure 20*).



*Figure 20: EPOC X on user (left), NeuroGaze input device: EPOC X, comfort headband and Meta Quest Pro on user (middle), applying saline solution to EPOC X electrodes (right)*



Users should first put on the EPOC X by moving any hair out of the way and make direct scalp contact with each electrode. To keep a stable connection to between the user's head and the EPOC X electrodes, OPTI-FREE saline solution was applied to all 14 contact electrode access points (See *Figure 19*). Then, a comfort headband is used to keep the EPOC X headset in place. Finally, the Meta Quest Pro is worn on top of the EPOC X. Before tightening the Meta Quest Pro, users should verify that they can see the VE clearly.

#### **4.1.2 Procedure**

The experiment is designed as a 1 (task complexity; within subject) x 3 (available input devices; between subject) mixed design study in which participants will be evaluated on all three input devices in virtual reality (NeuroGaze: eye gaze ray for hovering, EEG for selection to interact with object. VR controller: ray from controller to hover, trigger button to select. Eye Gaze + Hand Tracking: eye gaze ray for hovering, pinch gesture to interact with object). Users will have to select all the red interactable objects out of the white ones in the scene where task performance will be evaluated by determining the time taken to select all the red interactable objects and how many were selected correctly. The studies took place on the UCF main campus in the same room with the Principal Investigator (PI) is consisted of the following procedure:

1. The participant first completed a demographics survey (See *Appendix B.1*) recording age, gender, familiarity to using VR systems, familiarity playing video games, listing any video games they play, listing any VR video games they play and if the participant is allergic to any of ingredients found in our saline solution.
2. We provided an overview of the electroencephalogram (EEG) headset the participant will be wearing (the Emotiv EPOC X) and the VR headset (the Meta Quest Pro) and demonstrate to participants how to put both headsets on.

3. The participant put the EEG headset on, and we assisted moving the nodes around to ensure the best contact quality and comfort for participants. Saline solution was applied to each node on the EEG headset to help establish a higher contact quality between the EEG headset and the participant's scalp. Some participants were asked to put their hair in a higher position to accommodate for EEG node placement.
  - a. At this time, the EmotivBCI software used to collect user EEG data should be running and connected to the Emotiv EPOC X EEG headset.
  - b. The EmotivBCI program displays the contact quality of each node on the participants head and this is the time to make sure every node has a high contact quality.
  - c. More saline solution may be applied to a node on the EEG if the EmotivBCI program is showing that the contact quality of that node is low.
4. We put the VR headset on the participants head and helped the participant adjust it for their comfort.
5. We calibrate the eye trackers in the Meta Quest VR headset by using the built in calibration software.
6. Each participant is randomly assigned an input device to be evaluated on. Steps 7 – 14 describe the evaluation setup and actions performed for each input device.
7. We load the NeuroGaze training game in VR and explain what participant will need to do.
  - a. At this time, the EmotivBCI software should be ready to begin collecting data.
8. The participant performed tasks in VR within the training game that we used to gather their EEG data.
  - a. The training game within the VE consists of a black room with a singular red interactable objects in the middle of the room.

- b. Participants were told to look around the room over 8 seconds intervals. These 8 second intervals are repeated 20 times (160 seconds in total).
  - c. Over these 8 second intervals, the PI started the EEG data collection within the EmotivBCI program for the *neutral state*. This is the baseline state for the participants EEG data.
  - d. Participants were then told to look at the red interactable objects in the black room and over 8 second intervals, attempt to shrink the interactable by thinking of a repeatable action that they can easily recall. This 8 second interval is repeated 20 times (160 seconds in total).
  - e. During these 8 second intervals, the PI started the EEG data collection within the EmotivBCI program for the *shrink state*. Additionally, the PI forced the red interactable object to shrink over this 8 second interval to give the illusion that the participant is shrinking the interactable object for the EEG training data to be as accurate as possible. This is the data used to classify when the participant wants to shrink an object.
9. Once the training sessions are over, we loaded the evaluation game in VR and participants were told what to do.
- a. The evaluation game puts participants in the same black box within the VE as they were in during the training game. Now, instead of one red interactable object, each wall has a 4x9 array of interactable objects (36 per wall, 144 in total).
  - b. When participants look at the interactable objects, they will grow to a set size to let the participant know they are interacting with the interactable objects.
  - c. When the participant is ready, the PI will start the evaluation game and start the link between the evaluation game and the EmotivBCI program.

- d. Once the evaluation game has started, three interactable objects on each wall will be randomly chosen to turn red (12 red interactable objects in total).
  - e. Participants will need to look at these red interactable objects and imagine they are shrinking it. Once these conditions have been met, the red interactable objects in the game will disappear.
  - f. Participants are tasked with making all the red interactable objects in the game disappear as quickly and accurately as they can to complete the evaluation game.
  - g. This evaluation game is run for three rounds and performance data is recorded.
10. We removed the EEG headset and the VR headset from the participant's head.
11. Participants completed one Qualtrics NASA-TLX survey on a laptop that gives feedback on the NeuroGaze interaction technique. After completion of this survey, this will conclude the NeuroGaze evaluation section of the experiment.
12. We put the VR headset back on the participant and help adjust the headset for their comfort. We will load the evaluation game in VR and the participant will perform a task using their eyes and hands.
- a. Like the NeuroGaze evaluation, participants are placed in the same black box with the same 4x9 array of interactable objects that change size when the users look at them.
  - b. When the PI starts the assessment, 4 interactable objects will randomly turn red and participants must as quickly and accurately as possible, look at a red interactable and perform a "pinch gesture" with their hands to make all the red interactable objects disappear.
  - c. This evaluation game is run for three rounds and performance data is recorded.
13. We removed the VR headset from the participants head and participants will complete one Qualtrics NASA-TLX survey on a laptop that gives feedback on the Eye Tracking combined with

Hand Tracking interaction technique. After completion of this survey, this concludes the Eye Tracking combined with Hand Tracking evaluation section of the experiment.

14. We put the VR headset back on the participant and help adjust the headset for their comfort. We put the participant in the evaluation game in VR and the participant will perform a task using VR controllers.
  - a. Participants are placed in the same black box with the same 4x9 array of interactable objects.
  - b. These interactable objects will change size when the user points their controller at them.
  - c. When the PI starts the assessment, 4 interactable objects will randomly turn red and participants must as quickly and accurately as possible, point their controller at a red interactable objects and click the trigger to make all the red interactable objects disappear.
  - d. This evaluation game is run for three rounds and performance data will be recorded.
15. We removed the VR headset from the participants head and gather the VR controllers from the participant. Participants will complete one Qualtrics NASA-TLX survey on a laptop that gives feedback on the VR controller interaction technique. After completion of this survey, this concludes the VR controller evaluation section of the experiment.
16. The VR headset was removed, and we gathered the VR controllers.
17. Participants completed one Post Evaluation survey giving their feedback about the entire experiment and all three interaction techniques evaluated.

## **4.2 Results**

### **4.2.1 Experience with VR/AR Systems**

Participants were asked to rank their familiarity with VR, AR, and video games. Specifically, participants were asked: “Please rate your level of experience with each of the following (1 means no experience, 5 means very experienced).” The results found in Table 1 show that for VR: 3 participants reported

no experience, 2 participants reported little experience, 7 participants reported moderate experience, 5 participants reported above moderate experience and 3 participants reported that they were very experienced. For AR experience: 7 participants reported no experience, 5 participants reported little experience, 5 participants reported moderate experience, 2 participants reported above moderate experience and 1 participant reported that they were very experienced. For VR Video Games: 3 participants reported no experience, 3 participants reported little experience, 3 participants reported moderate experience, 5 participants reported above moderate experience, and 2 participants reported that they were very experienced.

*Table 1: Experience Level Results (1 – no experience, 5 – very experienced)*

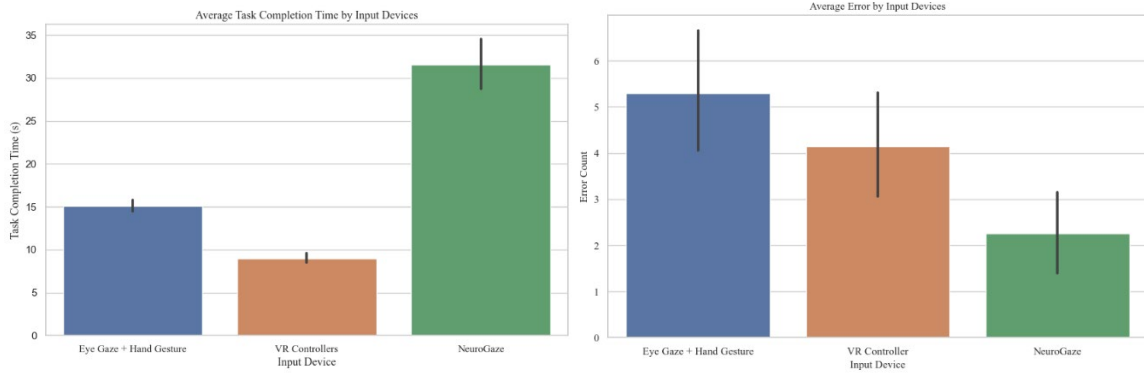
	1	2	3	4	5
Virtual Reality	3	2	7	5	3
Augmented Reality	7	5	5	2	1
VR Video Games	3	3	7	5	2

#### 4.2.2 Task Completion Time & Error Count

As stated in the procedure, participants were tasked with selecting all the red interactable objects in the scene as quickly and accurately as possible. Error in our evaluation is defined as missing a selectable object or selecting the wrong object in the scene. The task completion time for each round was defined as how long each user took to select every red interactable objects in the scene. The averaged results of how each selection technique did after this evaluation can be found in Table 2 where Average Task Completion Time is measured in seconds. The data is visualized through Figure 21 with 95% confidence interval error bars.

*Table 2: Evaluation result means for each input device*

Selection Technique	$\mu_{Task\ Completion\ Time\ (s)}$	$\mu_{Average\ Error}$
NeuroGaze	29.23	2.25
Eye Tracking combined with Hand Gesture	15.02	5.3
VR Controllers	9.25	4.15



**Figure 21:** Average Task Completion Time (left) and Average Error Count (right) for each input device

Before applying significance tests, we performed Mauchly's Test for Sphericity on the Time Completion Task ( $\chi^2(20) = 29.222, p < 0.001$ ) and Error Count ( $\chi^2(20) = 4.933, p = 0.85$ ) evaluation data. The results for Task Completion Time violated sphericity so we applied the Greenhouse-Geisser correction. A repeated measures ANOVA test with Greenhouse-Geisser correct applied was performed to measure significance between selection devices for task completion time and average error count.

**Table 3:** RM-ANOVA statistical effects, Task Completion sand Error Count (\* =  $p < .05$ ; \*\* =  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* =  $p < .001$ )

Measure	F	$df_{effect}$	$df_{error}$	p	$\eta_p^2$	Sig
Task Completion Time	97.624	2	19.772	< 0.001	0.844	***
Error Count	5.385	2	36	p = 0.009	0.23	**

The results show that there is high significant difference being found for both the Time Completion Task ( $F_{(2,19.772)} = 97.642, p < 0.001, \eta_p^2 = 0.844$ ) and Error Count ( $F_{(2,36)} = 5.385, p = 0.009, \eta_p^2 = 0.23$ ) between the input devices. A summary can be found in Table 3.

### 4.2.3 NASA-TLX Surveys

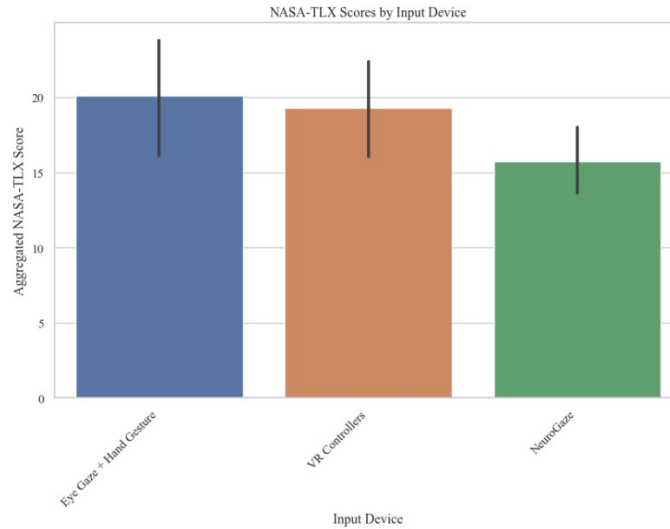


Figure 22: Aggregated NASA-TLX Score for each input device

After each selection device, participants were asked to fill out a 7-point scale NASA-TLX to evaluate cognitive load. The NASA-TLX survey consisted of the following questions:

1. How mentally demanding was the task? (Mental Demand)
2. How physically demanding was the task? (Physical Demand)
3. How hurried or rushed was the pace of the task? (Temporal Demand)
4. How successful were you in accomplishing what you were asked to do? (Performance)
5. How hard did you have to work to accomplish your level of performance? (Effort)
6. How insecure, discouraged, irritated, stressed and annoyed were you? (Frustration)

The total NASA-TLX score was calculated per input device as follows:

$$\text{NASA-TLX Score} = \text{Mental Demand} + \text{Physical Demand} + \text{Temporal Demand} + (7 - \text{Performance}) + \text{Effort} + \text{Frustration}$$



Table 4: Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test for Individual Subscale Scores for each input device

NASA-TLX Question	Input Device Comparison	Z-Statistic	p-value	Significant?
Mental	VR Controllers vs. Eye Gaze + Hand Gesture	14	$p = 0.026$ ; $p < 0.05$	Yes
Mental	VR Controllers vs. NeuroGaze	89.5	$p = 0.82$ ; $p > 0.05$	No
Mental	Eye Gaze + Hand Gesture vs. NeuroGaze	57	$p = 0.12$ ; $p > 0.05$	No
Physical	VR Controllers vs. Eye Gaze + Hand Gesture	17	$p = 0.89$ ; $p > 0.05$	No
Physical	VR Controllers vs. NeuroGaze	19	$p = 0.02$ ; $p < 0.05$	Yes
Physical	Eye Gaze + Hand Gesture vs. NeuroGaze	12	$p = 0.006$ ; $p < 0.05$	Yes
Temporal	VR Controllers vs. Eye Gaze + Hand Gesture	11	$p = 0.03$ ; $p < 0.05$	Yes
Temporal	VR Controllers vs. NeuroGaze	6.5	$p = 0.001$ ; $p < 0.05$	Yes
Temporal	Eye Gaze + Hand Gesture vs. NeuroGaze	7	$p = 0.002$ ; $p < 0.05$	Yes
Performance	VR Controllers vs. Eye Gaze + Hand Gesture	16	$p = 0.04$ ; $p < 0.05$	Yes
Performance	VR Controllers vs. NeuroGaze	43	$p = 0.1$ ; $p > 0.05$	No
Performance	Eye Gaze + Hand Gesture vs. NeuroGaze	61.5	$p = 0.47$ ; $p > 0.05$	No
Effort	VR Controllers vs. Eye Gaze + Hand Gesture	23	$p = 0.35$ ; $p > 0.05$	No
Effort	VR Controllers vs. NeuroGaze	35.5	$p = 0.16$ ; $p > 0.05$	No
Effort	Eye Gaze + Hand Gesture vs. NeuroGaze	55	$p = 0.49$ ; $p > 0.05$	No
Frustration	VR Controllers vs. Eye Gaze + Hand Gesture	22	$p = 0.57$ ; $p > 0.05$	No
Frustration	VR Controllers vs. NeuroGaze	38.5	$p = 0.97$ ; $p > 0.05$	No
Frustration	Eye Gaze + Hand Gesture vs. NeuroGaze	54	$p = 0.72$ ; $p > 0.05$	No

The average aggregated NASA-TLX score for each input device showing an Eye Gaze + Hand Gesture yielded a score of 20.1, VR controllers a score of 19.30, and NeuroGaze a score of 15.75. To determine significance for repeated measures, a Friedman Test was conducted across the aggregated NASA-TLX scores across input devices. The test shows  $p = 0.29$ ;  $p > 0.05$  which shows no statistical significance.

Since the calculated NASA-TLX score did not show significance, we chose to evaluate significance across each individual NASA-TLX subscale score across input devices by running a Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test (See *Table 5*). The question and input devices that showed significance are as follows: Mental question for VR Controllers vs. Eye + Hand Gesture with  $Z - Statistic = 14$  and  $p - value = 0.026$ , Physical question for VR Controllers vs. NeuroGaze with  $Z - Statistic = 19$  and  $p - value = 0.02$ , Physical question for Eye Gaze + Hand Gesture vs. NeuroGaze with  $Z - Statistic = 12$  and  $p - value = 0.006$ , Physical question for VR Controllers vs. Eye Gaze + Hand Gesture with  $Z - Statistic = 11$  and  $p - value = 0.03$ , Temporal question for VR Controllers vs. NeuroGaze with  $Z - Statistic = 6.5$  and  $p - value = 0.001$ , Temporal question for Eye Gaze + Hand Gesture vs. NeuroGaze with  $Z - Statistic = 7$  and  $p - value = 0.002$ , Performance question for VR Controllers vs. Eye Gaze + Hand Gesture with  $Z - Statistic = 16$  and  $p - value = 0.04$ .

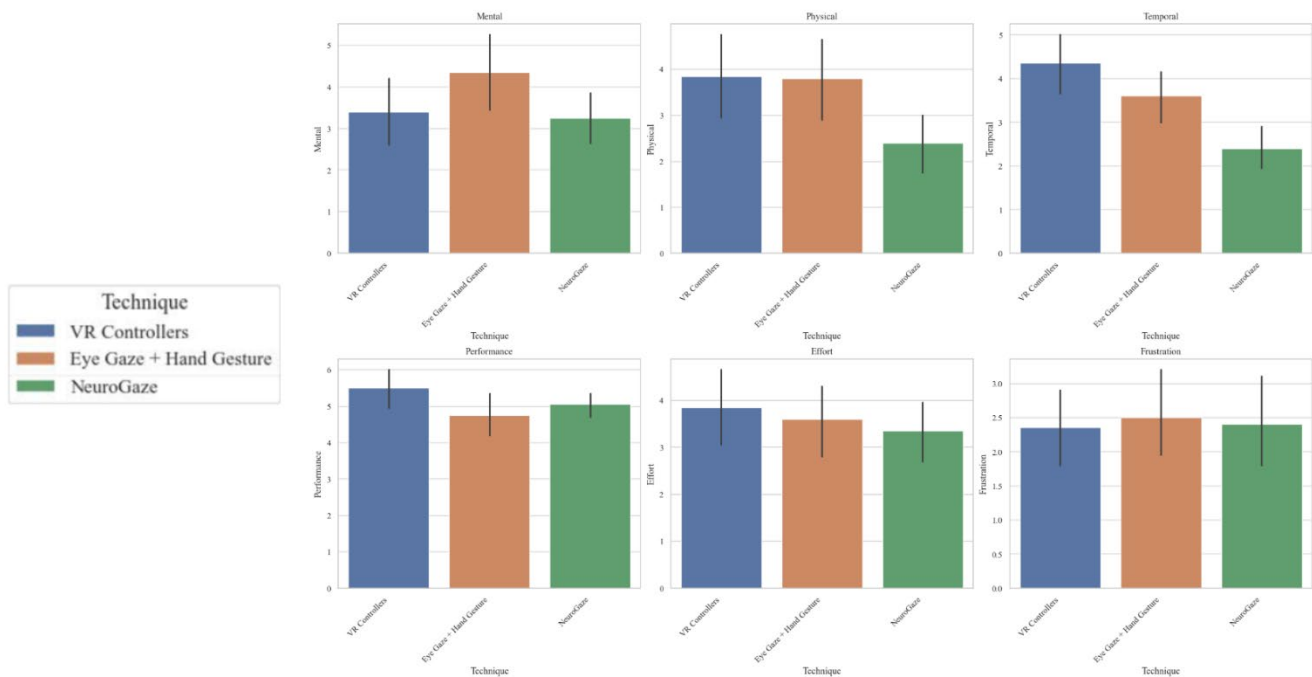


Figure 23: NASA TLX Individual Subscale Mean Score for each Input Device

#### 4.2.4 Post Evaluation Survey

Participants were given a Post Evaluation Survey (See Appendix B.3) to gather qualitative data about how about motor imagery users thought of to select objects and how they would rank each input device overall against one another. Common complaints about the NeuroGaze included not being comfortable to wear for longer durations, which we predicted due to poor ergonomic compatibility between the EEG headset and the Meta Quest Pro HMD. Users also complained about some lethargic response times from NeuroGaze in times when they wanted to select. Users were frustrated with VR controllers in moments when they would mistake the grip button for the trigger, resulting in no selection when they wanted to. Even though we explicitly showed users the trigger was for selection, they repeatedly clicked the grip button and would complain. Users also included sentiments about their arms being tired by the time the last round. The Eye Gaze + Hand Gesture input device seemed to frustrate users the most

because they would not complete the entire pinching gesture required to select an object. At times, they wouldn't open their fingers on one hand before trying to select with another, increasing their task completion time and resulting in annoyance.

Participants were asked to rank the input devices evaluated overall with 1 being most preferred, 2 being intermediate preference, and 3 being least preferred (See Table 5).

*Table 5: Raw tally of user preference of input devices evaluated*

<b>Input Device</b>	<b>1 (Most Preferred)</b>	<b>2 (Intermediate Preference)</b>	<b>3 (Least Preferred)</b>
NeuroGaze	10	6	4
VR Controllers	5	8	7
Eye Gaze + Hand Gesture	5	6	9

A Chi-Squared Test of Independence was performed across preferences to gauge significance ( $\chi^2_2(N = 20) = 4.8, p = 0.31$ ). The p-value is greater than the common significance level of  $\alpha = 0.05$ , thus we can reject the null hypothesis and state there is not enough evidence to support a significant association between input devices and their preference rankings.

### 4.3 Discussion

The evaluation of NeuroGaze against traditional input devices such as VR Controllers and Eye Gaze combined with Hand Gesture reveals insights into user performance and preference within virtual environments. NeuroGaze's higher average task completion time indicates a greater displacement in time between when users want to select an object, reflecting a major usability limitation, even if this device had the lowest error count. This is further supported by a very low p-value when looking for statistical significance between the input devices. On the contrary, VR Controllers maintained a low mean task completion time with the second highest error showcasing the input device's ability to balance accuracy and speed. Eye Gaze + Hand Tracking resulting in the second longest task completion time and the highest error count. Even though NeuroGaze accrued the highest average task completion time, it boasts the

lowest average error count showing that users were able select objects they wanted with more accuracy. A low p-value ( $p = 0.009$ ) supports the significance between error rates among the input devices and highlights NeuroGaze's ability to empower correct user selection, even at the cost of .

Just looking at these statistics, we believed VR Controllers would be a clear victor since users were able to select objects 3.16 times more quickly than NeuroGaze and nearly 2 times quicker than Eye Gaze + Hand Gesture, even if it cost the device some error. However, the user self-reported data suggests otherwise. Even though the average aggregated NASA-TLX scores for each input device showed no statistical significance, the significance tests performed on the individual subscale score showed significance between input devices. Starting with Physical Demand, NeuroGaze had a lower score than both VR Controllers and Eye Gaze + Hand Gestures supported with a significance of  $p = 0.02$  and  $p = 0.006$  and no significant in physical demand between VR Controllers and Eye Gaze combined with Hand Gestures  $p = 0.89$ . Despite NeuroGaze requiring users to recall a thought to select objects, there was still no statistical significance between the input device and VR controllers  $p = 0.82$  nor Eye Gaze + Hand Gesture  $p = 0.12$  for Mental Demand. Additionally, the means between VR Controllers and NeuroGaze were similar ( $\mu_{VR\text{ Controllers}} = 3.3$ ;  $\mu_{NeuroGaze} = 3.2$ ) for Mental Demand. Every pair of input devices yielded significance for the Temporal Demand score, with NeuroGaze having the lowest mean  $\mu_{NeuroGaze} = 3.2$ . From this we can infer that users felt a very different Temporal Demand across devices and felt like they were least rushed to complete the task with the NeuroGaze system. With the highest mean task completion time, it is not surprising users felt the pace of the task to be more leisurely. The results for Performance surprised the research team the most compared to the rest of the NASA-TLX results. The only significance for this question was between VR Controllers and Eye Gaze + Hand Gesture ( $p = 0.04$ ). With the highest mean error count, it is not unreasonable for users to report they felt the least performant when using the Eye Gaze + Hand Gesture input device. However, we were surprised to see there was no significance between any of the input devices and NeuroGaze considering how much longer this device took

users to select all the objects they needed to complete the task. This may suggest users did not mind taking longer to select objects, if they selected them correctly. This hypothesis is further supported by no statistical significance for Frustration between NeuroGaze and the other two input devices.

The Post Evaluation survey gave users a chance to explicitly state how they felt about the input devices as compared to one another. The ranking question results showed us that users preferred NeuroGaze the most, VR controllers and then Eye Gaze + Hand Gesture the least. Although we could not conclude statistical significance from the Chi-Squared Test for these rankings, we can still conclude that users did not strongly dislike the NeuroGaze system when compared to more familiar selection devices. When asked what users would change about the interaction techniques, making the EPOC X and Meta Quest Pro more comfortable is a well-known improvement over half the users requested. When asked what users thought of the select the cube, every single user reported some type of kinematic movement (e.g. “punching the object,” “crushing the object like a stress ball,” “using the force to destroy it”). There were some users who especially took advantage of the ability to think of something that was personal to them such as “strumming my guitar” or “running at the gym.”

Anecdotal evidence from this user study also gave us insight into the limitations of our input device and what users enjoyed about the system. When users used NeuroGaze, there was usually a positive shock value that was expressed through comments like “I wasn’t expecting to actually be able to control objects with my mind” or “That was very cool and unique, I’d like to try it again.” Very quickly we observed a learning curve user expressing that they were “getting the hang of it.” One user even compared his experience with NeuroGaze to when he first used his Apple Vision Pro HMD. At first, they had a tough time interacting with objects in the VE, but after some time, they claimed it felt intuitive and natural. A common occurrence observed from users when using the Eye Gaze + Hand Tracking was users failed to release their fingers to complete the pinch gesture and attempted to select another object with their other hand. Despite being told they needed to release their fingers to select another object, many users continue to keep their

fingers pinched on one hand and tried to select with the other. VR controllers caused the most verbal frustration with users when they attempted to select objects. Specifically, users would accidentally press the grip buttons on the side of the controller mistakenly thinking they were the triggers and would perform an incorrect selection, despite being reminded which button was the trigger. A couple users would exclaim that they swore they clicked the trigger button and became slightly frustrated.

## CHAPTER FIVE: FUTURE WORK

This Thesis provided our research team with a proof of concept to build upon in future interactions. The NeuroGaze system has shown that it is possible to accurately select objects in a VE with eye gaze and non-invasive BCIs. This was a learning experience and as such we will be taking the lessons learned to iterate on the NeuroGaze design. We plan to try new EEG headsets as the EPOC X is a commercial EEG headset and a medical grade headset would give us access to more channels and higher quality EEG data for classification. Additionally, users expressed general discomfort when wearing the NeuroGaze system for a prolonged period. To mitigate this in the future, we would try an EEG cap which might reduce the amount of pressure put on the front of the user's head since EEG caps usually have more evenly distributed channels. It might also be interesting to develop our own EEG headset using the electrode nodes, board and firmware offered by OpenBCI. This would allow us to strategically choose which channels we would want to access and design the headset in a way that's more compatible with the Meta Quest Pro HMD. If funding allows, we would like to research the use of functional near-infrared spectroscopy (fNIRS) in place of EEG. Studies suggest that EEG is better for classification of emotional state but fNIRS has better performance as classification motor imagery. We believe this would increase our ability to more accurately classify selection artifacts from the EEG stream and hopefully decrease task completion time. We are also interested in potentially spending the time to train our own machine learning denoising and classification machine learning algorithm. The ability to personalize this model to our needs would allow us to classify specific artifacts we want to filter out such as repeated kinematic movement. This would remove physical restrictions we had to put in place for the NeuroGaze system and would allow users to move around in the Unity scene without the fear of unnecessary noise in the EEG data. Evaluation of a user's ability to track moving objects with eye gaze and select using this version of NeuroGaze



could also bring about some interesting research into this systems ability utilize the natural eye movement of *saccade* to *smooth pursuit*.

For future evaluations, we would design the experiment to adhere to 3D UI evaluation criteria and best practices more strictly. For example, our performance metrics were completion time and accuracy, but we told users to attempt to perform their best in both categories each round. Instead, we will tell users to be as accurate as possible for one round, as quick as possible for one round, and then as quick and accurate for the final round. This would give us a more holistic overview of the tradeoffs between speed and accuracy for the NeuroGaze system and the other two input devices.

Overall, we are very interested in continuing to research the applications of BCI interfacing with VEs and 3DUIs. Although our task completion time was not optimal, we believe that the positive user sentiments seen in the NASA-TLX surveys and Post Evaluation survey suggest users still believe this input device has usability.

## CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

This thesis presented NeuroGaze, a novel VR input device that combines eye tracking with EEG data to facilitate object selection in VEs. The system's design, development, and evaluation underscore the potential of integrating noninvasive biometric inputs to create more intuitive and accessible user interfaces. Despite facing challenges such as user adaptation and cognitive load, NeuroGaze demonstrates a promising direction for future VR interaction technologies. By pushing the boundaries of traditional VR input devices, NeuroGaze not only offers a possible enrichment to the interaction paradigm within VEs but could also serve as an alternative for users with physical disabilities who have little or no autonomy to interact with VEs. As VR continues to evolve, we believe continued research into systems like NeuroGaze will play a pivotal role in shaping immersive experiences that are both inclusive and engaging. NeuroGaze represents a significant step forward in the quest for seamless human-computer interaction within virtual worlds. We hope its development and study contribute valuable insights to the field of both HCI and BCI research, laying the groundwork for future innovations that will further dissolve the barriers between the human mind and interactions in virtual environments.

## **APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL FORM**



UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

**Institutional Review Board**

FWA00000351  
IRB00001138, IRB00012110  
Office of Research  
12201 Research Parkway  
Orlando, FL 32826-3246

APPROVAL

March 14, 2024

Dear Wanyea Barbel:

On 3/14/2024, the IRB reviewed the following submission:

Type of Review:	Initial Study, Category
Title:	NeuroGaze in Virtual Reality: Assessing EEG and Eye Tracking Interfaces Against Conventional VR Selection Methods
Investigator:	Wanyea Barbel
IRB ID:	STUDY00006401
Funding:	None
IND, IDE, or HDE:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• HRP-251 - FORM - Faculty Advisor - NeuroGaze.pdf, Category: Faculty Research Approval;</li><li>• 502.pdf, Category: Consent Form;</li><li>• 503.docx, Category: IRB Protocol;</li><li>• A&amp;FCommunicationsRequestForm.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;</li><li>• GoogleFormExplained.pdf, Category: Survey / Questionnaire;</li><li>• Qualtrics_NeuroGaze_Post_Evaluation_Survey.docx, Category: Survey / Questionnaire;</li><li>• Qualtrics_NeuroGaze_VR_Demographics_Survey.docx, Category: Survey / Questionnaire;</li><li>• Qualtrics_NeuroGaze_VR_NASA_TLX.docx, Category: Survey / Questionnaire;</li><li>• RecruitmentEmail.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;</li><li>• ReferenceImages.docx, Category: Other;</li></ul>

The IRB approved the protocol on 3/14/2024.

In conducting this protocol, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within the IRB system. Guidance on submitting Modifications and a Continuing Review or Administrative Check-in is detailed in the manual. If continuing review is required and approval is not granted before the expiration date, approval of this protocol expires on that date.

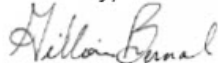
If this protocol includes a consent process, use of the time-stamped version of the consent form is required. You can find the time-stamped version of the consent form in the "**Documents**" tab under the "**Final**" column.

To document consent, use the consent documents that were approved and stamped by the IRB. Go to the Documents tab to download them.

When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request so that IRB records will be accurate.

If you have any questions, please contact the UCF IRB at 407-823-2901 or [irb@ucf.edu](mailto:irb@ucf.edu). Please include your project title and IRB number in all correspondence with this office.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Gillian Bernal".

Gillian Bernal  
Designated Reviewer

## **APPENDIX B: SAMPLE SURVEYS**

## **B.1 Qualtrics Demographic Survey**

# NeuroGaze VR Demographics Survey

Welcome! This is the Demographics Survey for the Study on Assessing EEG and Eye Tracking Interfaces Against Conventional VR Selection Methods. Click the arrow to begin.

Q1 Participant Number

Q2 Age

Q3 Gender Identity

Q4 Please rate your level of expertise with each of the following (1 means no experience, 5 means very experienced)					
	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)
Virtual Reality (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Augmented Reality (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Video Games (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Q5 List any virtual reality games you have played:

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---

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Q6 Are you allergic to any of the following ingredients found in the saline solution ( ) we will be using?

Ingredients: Sodium Citrate, Sodium Chloride, Boric Acid, Sorbitol, Aminomethyl Propanol, Disodium EDTA, Two Wetting Agents (Tetronic 1304 and HydraGlyde Moisture Matrix [EOBO-41- polyoxyethylenepolyoxybutylene]) with Polyquad (Polyquaternium-1) 0.001% and Aldox (Myristamidopropyl Dimethylamine) 0.0006% Preservatives. HydraGlyde Moisture Matrix is a Proprietary Multi-functional Block Copolymer that is Primarily Designed for Wetting and Lubricating Silicone Hydrogel Lenses.

☐ Yes (1)

☐ No (2)

---

Q7 Do you have any previous history of simulator sickness?

☐ Yes (1)

☐ No (2)

End of Block: Default Question Block

---

## **B.2 Qualtrics NASA-TLX Survey**

# NeuroGaze VR NASA TLX

---

Start of Block: Default Question Block

Welcome! This is the NASA TLX Survey for the Study on Assessing EEG and Eye Tracking Interfaces Against Conventional VR Selection Methods. Click the arrow to begin.

---

Participant Number

---

Technique being Evaluated

- ☐ NeuroGaze: EEG + Eye Tracking
  - ☐ Eye Tracking + Hand Tracking
  - ☐ VR Controllers
-

Please answer each prompt based on your experience:

	1 (Very Low)	2	3	4	5	6	7 (Very High)
How mentally demanding was the task?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How physically demanding was the task?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How hurried or rushed was the pace of the task?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How successful were you in accomplishing what you were asked to do?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How hard did you have to work to accomplish your level of performance?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How insecure, discouraged, irritated, stressed, and annoyed were you?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: Default Question Block

### **B.3 Qualtrics Post Evaluation Survey**

# NeuroGaze Post Evaluation Survey

Start of Block: Default Question Block

Welcome! This is the Post Evaluation Survey for the Study on Assessing EEG and Eye Tracking Interfaces Against Conventional VR Selection Methods. Click the arrow to begin.

Participant Number

Did you feel like you were making the cube shrink during the training scene?  
(Include any additional comments under your answer choice)<

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

How intuitive was each technique to to use? (Include any additional comments the under technique)

	1 (least intuitive)	2	3	4	5 (most intuitive)
NeuroGaze (EEG combined with Eye Tracking)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Eye Tracking combined with Hand Tracking	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
VR Controllers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

---

What would you change about any of the interaction techniques or the experiment? If nothing, answer "Nothing"

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---

Which interaction technique did you prefer overall?  
(Include any additional comments under your answer choice)

☐ NeuroGaze (EEG combined with Eye Tracking)

---

☐ Eye Tracking combined with Hand Tracking

---

☐ VR Controllers 

---

End of Block: Default Question Block

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