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Nanotechnology and Eyetracking: Ethical Challenges in Educational Research

Małgorzata Obrycka

University of Gdańsk, Poland

Corresponding author
Małgorzata Obrycka, University of Gdańsk, Poland.

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ABSTRACT
This article explores the burgeoning intersection of nanotechnology and eye-tracking systems, particularly within the context of educational research. The objective of this text is to analyze the synergy between nanotechnology and eye-tracking systems within the context of innovations in ophthalmology and their implementation in educational research. Nanotechnology, which involves engineering at the atomic and molecular levels, offers the potential to revolutionize current eye-tracking methodologies by replacing traditional, bulky infrared cameras and sensors with miniaturized, high-efficiency, and discreet devices. While these advancements promise to enhance the study of student-school interactions through more seamless and less intrusive monitoring, they also introduce significant ethical dilemmas. The transition toward nearly invisible tracking technologies in educational settings necessitates a critical examination of privacy, informed consent, and the long-term implications of molecular-level engineering in social science research.

Keywords: Nanotechnology, Eyetracking, Education, Ethics, Miniaturization, Human-Computer Interaction

Introduction

The objective of this article is to analyze the synergy between nanotechnology and eye-tracking systems within the context of innovations in ophthalmology and their implementation in educational research. The paper aims to demonstrate that the integration of modern materials engineering with functional visual diagnostics allows not only for the overcoming of clinical barriers but also for the creation of a new educational ecosystem. It is now clear that the ways people interact with computers are changing radically [1,2]. The critical challenges facing educational systems over the next few decades pertain to the structural interconnectivity, universal accessibility, semantic depth, and perceived trustworthiness of information within extensive learning environments. The future of education in a digital world is a future of reappraising human knowledge, competencies, and actions through philosophical, pedagogical, social, economic, and technical lenses [3].

As Ray Kurzweil notes, we are now in a position to speed up the learning process by a factor of thousands or millions once again by migrating from biological to nonbiological intelligence [4]. Digital technologies not only reshape the ways we experience the world but also redefine intergenerational relationships and fundamental educational mechanisms. Their presence in educational and upbringing processes brings both new pedagogical opportunities and challenges related to the algorithmization of knowledge, content personalization, and the impact of digital infrastructures on media literacy. While we acknowledge that pedagogical reflection cannot remain indifferent to these processes, we argue that one of its key challenges is maintaining critical balance – resisting both techno-optimistic and techno-phobic perspectives [5].

Sergiusz Hessen emphasized “that 'all people are, to a greater or lesser extent, participants in the educational process. But even where education emerges as a distinct activity and becomes a profession, it occurs for the most part unconsciously. The task of pedagogy as a science is to introduce awareness and a critical attitude where, otherwise, an obscure habit and the irresponsibility of the rushing current of life prevail. Pedagogy is nothing other than the conscious realization of education – a process that concerns us all and is already unconsciously known to us all” [6]. With the above in mind, it is worth signaling that educational research on eye-tracking cannot be merely technical. It should be an act of conscious realization regarding how technology transforms the student-teacher relationship, ensuring that this process does not devolve into a form of hidden manipulation. In such an ecosystem,

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technological advancement supports learning and rehabilitation processes while maintaining rigorous ethical standards. The scope of this research encompasses four key dimensions: technology, education and rehabilitation, interdisciplinarity, and ethics. These dimensions constitute the research question posed in this paper, formulated as follows: how does the integration of nanotechnology with eye-tracking systems transform educational research methodology and functional vision diagnostics, and what ethical challenges arise from the application of these invisible monitoring technologies within the student-school interaction? Nanotechnology and eye tracking are two distinct fields that have the potential to complement each other, revolutionizing how we explore and interact with our surroundings, such as between students and schools. Nanotechnology, engineering at the atomic and molecular level, has the potential to significantly improve current eye tracking systems. Currently, eye tracking technologies often rely on bulky infrared cameras and sensors. What's more, a meta surface patterned on a regular pair of eyeglasses provides an unperturbed view of the world across the visible spectrum and redirects near-infrared light to a camera to allow imaging of the eye. Nanostructures can control infrared light (used for pupil tracking) without interfering with real-world vision. This is the foundation for future ultra-thin AR/VR glasses [7]. Also important is work on intelligent sensors based on nanocomposites that monitor eye movements (eye motion sensors) directly on the surface of the eye or in the frames – contact lenses [8].[1] Experts note that, Millions of people suffer from various ocular disorders, and conventional diagnostic and therapeutic strategies pose persistent challenges for early diagnosis and effective treatment. With the rapid advancement of nanotechnology, functional nanocomposites consisting of various nanofillers and matrices have been widely explored as smart sensors for ophthalmology management [9]. Nanotechnology allows for the creation of smaller, more efficient, and more discreet devices [10-14].

The core functionality of eye-tracking systems lies in their ability to record and analyze eye movements, typically through the operation of specialized infrared cameras.[2] From a research perspective, this technology is invaluable as it provides objective data on how a student processes visual information, explicitly revealing what they focus on and what they ignore during the learning process.[3] When integrated with nanotechnology, these traditionally infrared-based systems can be miniaturized, allowing this objective data collection to occur seamlessly. This enhancement serves a vital praxeological function: it transforms the classroom (and any other space) into a space where cognitive engagement can be measured with extreme precision, offering educators empirical evidence to refine their instructional methods based on the actual visual attention and information-processing patterns of their students [15-17].

In the field of educational research, eye-tracking technology is generally categorized into three primary types, each defined by its form factor and the degree of mobility it allows. stationary or remote eyetrackers are units typically mounted below a monitor that use infrared cameras to track corneal reflections while the user remains within a fixed headbox area. This type is highly effective for analyzing screen-based tasks, such as reading or software interaction. In contrast, mobile or wearable eyetrackers, such as specialized glasses, utilize inward-facing cameras to track pupil movement and outward-facing scene cameras to record the user's field of view. These are essential for studying authentic interactions within the classroom environment, though they currently face limitations regarding bulkiness and battery life. Finally, Integrated VR/AR Eye Tracking embeds sensors directly into virtual or augmented reality headsets, facilitating immersive simulation-based learning [20]. Thus, "What is needed is a much clearer understanding than we have at present of those approaches to curriculum development, and to teaching and learning processes, that optimize the potential of immersion programs, of how these approaches and processes might need to be varied in different contexts, and the differences in outcomes likely to result from such variations" [21].

The emergence of nanotechnology is particularly transformative for the wearable category, as it aims to replace traditional, cumbersome components with miniaturized, high-efficiency sensors. Most of these systems rely on pupil center corneal reflection – a method that calculates the vector between the pupil center and the reflection of infrared light. In addition, "multifunctional nanocomposites have become critical components in advancing sensing technologies, owing to their exceptional integration of mechanical, electrical, thermal, and optical properties" [22]. However, future nano-engineered vision sensors may bypass the need for traditional lenses altogether, allowing for almost invisible integration into contact lenses or standard eyewear. From a research perspective, these various modalities provide objective data on how a student processes visual information, specifically identifying which elements they focus on and which they ignore. Hence, learning materials are essential for student learning, especially in online education [23-25].

Research of this type holds transformative potential for children on the autism spectrum. In the context of autism spectrum disorder, the integration of nanotechnology with eye-tracking systems allows for the non-invasive monitoring of social attention patterns and joint attention behaviors without the sensory overload often triggered by traditional, bulky equipment. By analyzing gaze fixation on social versus non-social stimuli, researchers can gather objective data on how these children process their environment in real-time. Inference – defined as the integration of textual information with contextual knowledge to go beyond what is explicitly stated and formulate suppositions – represents a challenging pragmatic domain for children on the autism spectrum. While the majority of research on inferencing in autism has relied on behavioral measures, eye-tracking studies offer a significant alternative in this field [26].

[1]Although contact lenses were first developed for eyesight correction, new uses have recently become available. In the near future, it might be possible to monitor a variety of ocular and systemic disorders using contact lens sensors [8].

[2]It is worth noting that advanced visual functions include: visual analysis, visual synthesis, visual perception, visual memory, and eye-hand coordination [18].

[3]It should be emphasized that in social research, particularly in educational studies, the measurement of visual activity alone – without obtaining additional information through methods such as interviews or surveys –significantly diminishes its cognitive value [19].

A Praxeological Approach to Nanotechnology and Eyetracking in Education

Cognitive processes in a healthy human develop from the very first moments of life. The phenomenon of visual perception is typically defined as the ability to receive and distinguish between visual stimuli that are constantly present in the field of vision – shape, color, distance, and brightness [23]. Through these processes, we reconstruct and interpret the phenomena surrounding us, and ultimately, experience life itself. In the context of educational research, a praxeological approach focuses on the logic, efficiency, and rationality of human action [27-30]. It examines how the integration of nanotechnology and eyetracking optimizes the act of teaching and the act of learning. The issue of reconstructing ways of perceiving phenomena in the world (including in the educational sphere) is also significant.

In the words of Tadeusz Kotarbiński, the prominent Polish philosopher, ethicist, and logician: "What we do can be evaluated in various ways: for instance, morally, or in terms of the satisfaction derived from a given activity. However, an evaluation can also be conducted not emotionally, but utilitarianly. In such cases, the action is assessed from the perspective of so-called technical values: utility, expediency, and more broadly, efficiency, which boils down to two primary virtues – effectiveness and economy" [31]. According to this understanding, effectiveness consists in doing what serves as a good means to the set goal and avoiding errors in that regard. Economy, or thriftiness, is based on operating in a manner that is both sparing and productive with the available resources of space, time, materials, tools, and energy.

In this framework, the educational process is viewed as a series of purposeful actions where both the teacher and the student aim for maximum effectiveness. Nanotechnology acts as a catalyst for praxeological excellence by removing the physical and psychological barriers inherent in traditional research. By replacing bulky, intrusive hardware with discreet nano-sensors, we eliminate the observer effect, allowing for the study of authentic, undisturbed learning behaviors. This leads to a higher degree of practical utility in research, as the data gathered reflects real-world cognitive processes rather than laboratory-induced reactions [32].

Furthermore, the miniaturization enabled by nanotechnology redefines the cooperative structure between the educator and the learner. From a praxeological standpoint, an effective action is one that is precisely targeted. Nano-enhanced eye tracking provides a high-fidelity window into the student's cognitive load and attention patterns in real-time. This allows the teacher to transition from generalized instruction to highly rationalized, individual interventions. When the educator can diagnose a student's cognitive impasse at the moment it occurs, the "economy" of action is significantly improved – preventing wasted effort and ensuring that pedagogical support is delivered exactly when and where it is most effective.

However, a complete praxeological analysis must also consider the „non-economic costs" of such technological advancement. Following the principle that efficient action must also be morally sound, the transition to invisible monitoring raises significant questions about student autonomy and the risk of instrumentalization. If the learning process is reduced to a set of biological parameters to be optimized, the student risks being treated as a technical object rather than a human subject. Therefore, the praxeological challenge in modern educational research lies in balancing the undeniable gains in pedagogical efficiency with the preservation of the ethical integrity of the educational encounter.

A praxeological approach to nanotechnology in eye-tracking research allows for a redefinition of educational efficiency. The transition from invasive hardware to nano-sensors eliminates the dichotomy between the naturalness of the learning process and the precision of measurement. In this framework, technology is no longer a mere external tool but an integral element of the rationalization of pedagogical action, raising critical questions regarding the boundaries of cognitive interference. Moreover, "In the rapidly evolving landscape of smart devices, human-computer interaction (HCI) is becoming increasingly pivotal. The untapped potential of eye movements in HCI, particularly as an assistive technology for enhanced user accessibility, finds great promise by using triboelectric nanogenerators (TENGs) as a platform technology" [33].

From a praxeological perspective, this technology enables highly personalized pedagogical interventions. Educators can adjust the complexity of visual tasks based on the student's current cognitive load and gaze patterns. However, this also intensifies the ethical challenge of "neuroprivacy". Because eye tracking can reveal involuntary biological responses associated with "neurodivergence", it is vital to ensure that this cognitive area is used solely to empower the learner and is protected from any form of educational profiling or stigmatization. Nanotechnology, therefore, requires educators not only to understand technological progress but also to recognize the ethical context of their actions. The same applies to academics, researchers, and university educators.

Conclusions

The integration of nanotechnology into eye-tracking systems represents a double-edged sword for educational research. While the transition from bulky hardware to discreet, nano-engineered sensors eliminates behavioral bias and provides unprecedented insights into the cognitive processes of learning, it simultaneously erodes the traditional boundaries of student privacy. To harness these benefits without compromising ethical standards, the academic community must move beyond traditional one-time consent. Future research must be grounded in privacy-by-design principles, ensuring that as tracking becomes more invisible, the ethical guardrails protecting the student's cognitive area become more robust. Ultimately, the goal is not merely to observe more clearly, but to observe more responsibly. Following an analysis of the relationship between neurobiology and human rights, new rights are emerging in the literature that may become vital in the coming decades: the right to cognitive liberty, the right to mental privacy, the right to mental integrity, and the right to psychological continuity [34].

It should be noted that the clinical assessment of visual parameters does not fall within the competence of educators and teachers. The scope of educational intervention includes the functional diagnosis of visual perception, the results of which provide guidance for developing specific visual parameters and therapeutic activities. Therefore, it can be assumed that the functional assessment of a child's vision serves as a complement to the clinical evaluation [23]. Researchers point out that while clinical assessment focuses on the morphological and physiological causes affecting visual capacity and diagnoses abnormalities that form the basis for medical treatment, functional assessment provides information on vision as a foundation for rehabilitation efforts. Furthermore, it identifies external factors that can be modified during the rehabilitation process to enhance visual function [35].

Integrating education into this technological quartet (nanotechnology, biomedical engineering, materials science, and ophthalmology) creates a complete ecosystem. Without modern training, even the most groundbreaking discoveries will remain confined to laboratories, as there will be a lack of specialists capable of operating, implementing, or explaining them to patients. it is worth noting that technological innovations demand a new approach to education, while new education (e.g., based on eyetracking) enables the faster and more effective creation of further innovations.

The integration of nanotechnology with eyetracking systems revolutionizes educational research and functional diagnostics by shifting the paradigm from intrusive, laboratory-based observation to seamless, real-time monitoring within naturalistic school environments. By replacing bulky hardware with miniaturized nanosensors and metapower-based interfaces, this synergy eliminates the observer effect, providing a more authentic assessment of how students process visual information and interact with their surroundings. However, this transition introduces profound ethical dilemmas, as the inherent invisibility of nano-level tracking blurs the boundaries of privacy and complicates the process of informed consent. Within the student-school interaction, such pervasive monitoring raises critical concerns regarding biometric surveillance and the protection of a student’s cognitive data, necessitating a new ethical framework to govern the use of discreet, molecular-level engineering in social science research [36,37].

Academic ethics committees play a pivotal role in the deployment of nano-enabled eyetracking, transitioning from mere administrative bodies to essential guardians of transparency in research [38]. As monitoring technology becomes physically invisible through nanotechnology, these committees must shoulder the responsibility of ensuring that informed consent remains meaningful, requiring researchers to develop innovative ways of notifying participants of active data collection. Furthermore, they are tasked with the rigorous oversight of a student’s cognitive footprint, safeguarding high-fidelity biometric data against unauthorized profiling or institutional misuse [39]. By mandating an interdisciplinary evaluation of both the technical capabilities and the psychological risks of such pervasive surveillance, ethics committees serve as the necessary institutional framework to prevent clinical and educational innovation from devolving into unmonitored biometric exploitation [40].

Today’s world is changing the teacher’s job. They're no longer just the person with all the answers, but more of a mentor and guide who helps students develop critical thinking and emotional skills. Meanwhile, technology is taking over the heavy lifting of teaching facts and technical data. This whole setup shows how important it is to balance theory with practice, and to mix learning facts with real analysis. We can't stop progress, but we can figure out how to make it work for us in a world that's becoming much bigger and more complex than we ever imagined.

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