RESEARCH ARTICLE

Educator Professional Subjectivities in Gamification: Knowing, Being and Doing

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ABSTRACT

Gamification has emerged as a prominent innovation in contemporary education, yet its influence on the enactment of educators' professional subjectivities remains underexplored. As such, little is known about how online gamification applications like Kahoot shape the dynamic ways educators perceive, understand and enact their professional selves within higher education contexts. Adopting a tripartite framework of knowing (epistemological), being (ontological) and doing (praxiological), this qualitative study employed visual-elicitation interviews and remote observations with ten lecturers at a Middle Eastern college. The analysis revealed three key themes shaping educator subjectivities: creating and sharing quiz content; conforming with institutional culture; and infantilizing students with gamified learning. The findings suggest that Kahoot influenced how these educators perceived and performed their professional roles, enabling them to position themselves as creative content developers and aligned institutional practitioners, while also raising concerns about appropriate pedagogical approaches in tertiary contexts. This study demonstrates how gamification applications may actively shape professional subjectivities in higher education, emphasizing how successful gamification requires careful consideration of both institutional support and educator agency. Moreover, the findings offer important implications for professional development, institutional policy, and the thoughtful integration of gamification across diverse cultural contexts in contemporary higher education.

KEYWORDS

Gamification; educator subjectivity; Kahoot; higher education; educational technology

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Overview

While gamification continues to gain momentum as an innovative teaching approach in higher education, we know surprisingly little about how these game-based technologies shape educators' professional subjectivities (i.e., the dynamic ways teachers perceive, understand and enact their professional selves)[1]. This gap in academic understanding is significant, particularly as institutions worldwide invest heavily in commercial gamification accounts to enhance teaching and learning. Recent systematic review evidence has demonstrated that successful technology integration in higher education depends on both technological capabilities and strong institutional leadership to support knowledge sharing between educators and students [1], making it vital to understand how educators navigate these complex expectations in their daily practice. This study examines this intersection between gamification and educator experience through research conducted at a Middle Eastern college where Kahoot has become deeply entrenched in teaching practice. At this institution, Kahoot use is actively encouraged through commercial licensing and promoted via regular professional development (PD) workshops.

The paper examines reported educator experiences with Kahoot to reveal key implications for teaching practice, beliefs and professional subjectivity formation. Educator professional subjectivities are conceptualized through a framework that considers three essential elements: knowing (epistemological); being (ontological); and doing (praxiological) [2]. Following an explanation of the data collection approach, which combined visual-elicitation interviews with remote observations, three key themes are presented: creating and sharing; conforming with the institutional culture; and infantilizing learners. These themes illuminate how Kahoot use both supports and challenges educator professional subjectivities in contemporary higher education.

1.2. Kahoot

Kahoot is a widely used web-based and mobile quiz application that supports bring-your-own-device contexts [3]. Kahoot is used for a range of pedagogical purposes, including informal formative assessment, content review and providing breaks from more demanding activities [4]. Educators can choose from pre-made quizzes or create their own, incorporating multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blank or true-or-false question types[2]. After launching the game on the main screen, students submit their answers via their devices and track their progress on a leaderboard displayed on the educator's interface as shown in Figure 1.

1.3. Learners' Kahoot Experiences

Research examining student engagement with Kahoot reveals both promising benefits and significant considerations for teaching practice. A comprehensive meta-review found that the platform effectively boosted student confidence and self-efficacy while helping to maintain classroom interest [4]. Enhanced participation and interaction have also been widely reported [5], with evidence suggesting that gamified activities through Kahoot can positively influence lecture attendance rates [6].

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[1] The term 'professional subjectivity' (as opposed to 'academic subjectivity') is used since these educators' roles center primarily on teaching practices and pedagogical development in higher education, rather than academic research outputs.
[2] Kahoot also has interactive lessons that were not included in this study.

However, the platform's emphasis on students' continuous, active participation raises important pedagogical questions. The prevailing assumption that high levels of student engagement through gamification represents an ideal learning state may inadvertently marginalize students who prefer more passive forms of learning [7]. Student responses to Kahoot vary considerably – while some students thrive in its competitive environment, others may withdraw from participating when they perceive quizzes as overly challenging or unrelated to their learning goals [8]. Some learners have expressed concerns about Kahoot's educational value, noting that quiz activities can sometimes detract from deeper engagement with course content [8].

Figure 1. Screenshot of Kahoot Start-up on Educator's Interface

1.4. Educators' Kahoot Experiences

Scholarly attention to educators' situated experiences with Kahoot remains limited compared to student-focused research. The available studies suggest that Kahoot can improve classroom dynamics and offers convenient access to both public and private quiz repositories [4]. Teachers have noted its value for managing class time and reducing preparation demands [9], with research indicating enhanced teacher motivation and opportunities for real-time formative assessment [4].

However, while teachers may observe increased student attention through Kahoot use and view it as a useful supplement to traditional teaching approaches, we cannot assume all educators can facilitate substantive learning through gamified practice [10]. The platform presents a learning curve that can be both conceptually and practically challenging [11], with quiz creation requiring significant time investment to ensure accuracy and educational value. Technical disruptions can impact teaching flow, suggesting that effective implementation relies heavily on appropriate timing and clear student feedback [4]. When educators lack sufficient gamification knowledge and skills, Kahoot risks becoming a superficial exercise that displaces more valuable teaching activities [12]. This can obstruct meaningful learning [12] and shape negative beliefs that influence future technology adoption decisions [13]. Moreover, repeated use with the same student cohort may lead to diminishing returns through what researchers have termed 'gamification-fatigue', potentially affecting both students and teachers [13].

1.5. Kahoot Gamification and Implications for Educators

These studies reveal that integrating Kahoot into teaching practice involves both pedagogical opportunities and practical challenges. Thus, the effectiveness of gamification appears to depend heavily on educators' beliefs, values, experiences and teaching competence. While educators face increasing expectations to both use and design technology-enhanced activities competently [14], they remain

active decision-makers rather than passive technology users [2]. Moreover, they exercise considerable autonomy in determining how and when to implement Kahoot, regardless of institutional directives.

Research suggests that using gamification platforms like Kahoot prompts educators to adopt multiple teaching roles – from 'presenter' [15] and 'game show host' to 'organizer', 'planner' [16] and 'playmaker' [17]. Despite growing interest in how educators develop their subjectivity (professional sense of self) [18], [19], little is known about how teachers navigate their subjectivities within the expanding landscape of educational gamification [13]. This nascent terrain, characterized by digital practices, platform (Kahoot) features and institutional expectations, may require educators to reconsider their professional approaches. That is, they may need to adopt teaching personas that appear less authoritative and more playful – approaches that might conflict with their existing values, confidence levels or preferred teaching methods. This potential friction signals the need to extend on studies examining educator beliefs surrounding Kahoot to substantively investigate subjectivity enactment as it intersects with a gamified approach.

1.6 Educator Professional Subjectivities in Gamification

Professional subjectivities extend beyond fixed roles and, in this study, reflect the dynamic and multiple ways educators understand and enact their professional selves [11]. These subjectivities shape how teachers justify and legitimize their professional beliefs and actions within their practice [20]. This ongoing process is situated in the narratives individuals construct about themselves, their work and how others perceive them [21].

While numerous academic theories address educator professional subjectivity [20], this study adopts an appropriation framework [2] for its specificity in examining how teachers construct their professional selves through technology-enhanced teaching practices. This framework is particularly valuable for its focus on both the discursive and performative aspects of teacher subjectivity in game-related contexts. As shown in Table 1, the framework conceptualizes educator professional subjectivities across three facets: epistemological; ontological and praxiological [2]. The epistemological facet relates to an individual's beliefs and knowledge about teaching and their learners, while the ontological defines one's professional self-understanding during and after teaching activities. The praxiological facet pertains to the actions teachers exhibit when using gamified approaches in the classroom.

Table 1. Framework of knowing, being and doing across the three facets of educator professional subjectivity

Facet	Simple Concept	Meaning	Illustrative Example
Epistemological	Knowing	Educators' beliefs and knowledge regarding Kahoot and its effectiveness on student learning.	Changing beliefs about the value of gamified pedagogy; educators may come to harness or reject the value ascribed to this approach.
Ontological	Being	Educators' being and sense of self-understanding while enacting their pedagogy in a gamified setting.	The educator identifies with a different teaching persona, e.g., from instructor to entertainer.
Praxiological	Doing	Actions and behaviors, including how educators create Kahoot quizzes, facilitate gameplay and instruct students.	As they use gamification, educators' behaviors may change, e.g., type of lesson planning; performing practices differently.

This framework reveals how educators' adoption of game-based technologies in the lecture hall is a complex multilayered process [2]. When educators position themselves as change agents, actively embracing new technological approaches, implementation tends to be successful. Conversely, when educators resist these changes, implementation can falter. Thus, this framework helps illuminate how educator professional subjectivity fundamentally shapes the success of gamified teaching approaches [2].

Using the above framework to gain theoretical purchase on the area of professional selves in gamification, this study was driven by the following research question: *How are educator professional subjectivities produced and negotiated through Kahoot gamification?*

2. METHODS

2.1. Research Design and Methodological Framework

This study employed a qualitative research design underpinned by social constructionist ontology and interpretivist epistemology [22]. This approach was selected to examine how educators construct and negotiate their professional subjectivities through their experiences with Kahoot gamification. The methodology aligns with the theoretical understanding that professional subjectivities are dynamically constructed through narrative and practice. The data presented in this paper forms part of a larger study examining gamification in higher education through a socio-material lens [13].

2.2. Research Context, Sampling and Participants

The study was conducted at a tertiary institution in the Middle East where Kahoot gamification is actively promoted through institutional licenses and PD workshops [13]. Most faculty at this institution are expatriates from around the world. Using purposive sampling, lecturers who were likely to use gamification in their teaching practice were approached. Email addresses were extracted from the internal directory, and invitations distributed to thirty prospective educator informants who had been employed at the college for at least five years and had sufficient experience of using Kahoot. The sampling criteria included those educators teaching first-year students (with whom gamification is frequently utilized) and working in specific departments (Academic Writing, Mathematics, Research Methods, Sustainability and Life Skills) where interactive teaching approaches are commonplace. Out of thirty invited faculty members, ten lecturers participated in the study. This sample size allowed for in-depth exploration of participant experiences while maintaining manageable data collection and analysis. Participants were expatriate faculty from the USA, UK, Canada and Ireland, with an average of eight years' teaching experience at the institution. All participants reported using Kahoot at least twice weekly in their online teaching sessions.

2.3. Data Collection

2.3.1. Visual Elicitation Interviews

A pilot interview was initially carried out with one participant, which permitted experimentation with the draft interview schedule to check its functionality and adjust questions where needed [11]. The data from this pilot interview was included in the final analysis. For convenience, all interviews were conducted and recorded remotely using Zoom software. Although only ten interviews were conducted, each lasted at least one hour and the semi-structured format enabled extensive narratives, which generated substantial data for meaningful analysis [23].

The interviews incorporated a visual-elicitation style of prompting [24], with the Kahoot website displayed on the Zoom screen to help steer the interview content. This approach helped ground discussions in concrete examples of practice (the praxiological facet) and proved particularly effective for exploring participants' beliefs about gamification (the epistemological facet) and their self-understanding as educators (the ontological facet) [24]. The interviews covered several key areas: teaching experience; views on gamification in higher education; motivations for using Kahoot; experiences with Kahoot and the application's features; perceived impact on teaching practice and the effects on student engagement. While some may dispute the static and situated nature of interviews when conducting research into subjectivity, the combination of visual-elicitation and actual observations of lecturers using Kahoot helped overcome any conceivable limitations associated with interviewing [25].

2.3.2. Observations

By conducting observations, it was possible to augment the internal validity of the study [22] and allowed the researchers to remotely witness the lecturers' performances while using Kahoot in the online classroom. This permitted real-time observation of the lecturers and provided a window into their praxiological and ontological presence whilst teaching. While conducting the observations, field notes were taken. When combined with the interview data, these field notes offered an appropriate level of triangulation to bolster the data analysis [26].

2.4. Data Analysis

Interview recordings were transcribed using Zoom's transcript feature, which quickly processes the digital file and embeds accurate time stamps. The transcripts were reviewed to avoid inconsistencies in the data. Then, to ensure trustworthiness, all participants engaged in member checking reviewing the transcripts and field notes to verify their accuracy [27].

The data was coded using Atlas.ti 8 software to ensure a systematic process of organizing and analyzing the amassed data. The thematic data analysis was carried out according to the proposition that, when individuals describe the stories of their experience, they are simultaneously performing their professional subjectivities [28]. Additionally, when describing professional experiences, participants may reflect and proffer 'expressions of judgment and attitudes towards people and technology' [23]. Thus, the analysis aimed to reveal how participants viewed themselves, the institution and students in conjunction with how enacting Kahoot influenced their practice and narratives [23]. To directly respond to the research aim, coding was focused on instances where participants' words shed light on their subjectivities either explicitly – for example, *I don't want present as a lecturer who doesn't know how to have fun in the classroom* – or implicitly, for example, *It's one of my job objectives to use different kinds of gamification platforms at this college*; and this collated text was systematically assigned initial inductive semantic codes [29], [30].

Subsequently, further codes were developed deductively, using the theoretical framework to consider the narratives in terms of their, praxiological, epistemological and ontological representations [2]. In other words, the 'level of granularity' [23] correlated with what educators do, know and believe. This was an iterative procedure with some codes being eliminated, modified or collapsed [11]. The three themes depict a salient representation of factors influencing subjectivities as they emerge through Kahoot gamification.

2.5. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the research site's institutional review board prior to data collection. All participants received a detailed information sheet and provided written permission by signing a consent form, for both interviews and observations. Although the students were not the focus of the study, since they were participants in the observed online classes they also received the information sheet in Arabic and provided written consent by signing a form. The participants were informed they could relinquish their consent at any time if they felt uncomfortable or did not wish to continue. Although the researchers were not in positions of power over the educator participants, it was important to fully consider any possible issues of power or conflicts of interest that may arise during the study. As such, the participants were approached indirectly via email to minimize any obtrusiveness or feelings of pressure. Furthermore, the information sheets stated that declining to take part would have no repercussions for the participants' standing in the college. Given these mitigations to minimize the risks for participants, it was reasonable to assume that those who consented and participated understood and appreciated the research purpose and did not experience coercion.

A further important consideration involved protecting participant confidentiality and acknowledging respondent vulnerability within the Middle Eastern cultural context [11]. Given the conservative nature of the research setting, all identifying details including names, gender, the specific institution and nation have been withheld from research outputs [13]. Furthermore, educators in this context are non-tenured and thus experience a somewhat unstable employment status. With the above in mind, participants are referred to with the designation 'E' (educator) followed by their corresponding numerical identifier (E1-E10) in the results and discussion section, below.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results and Discussion Overview

Returning to the research question, *how are educator professional subjectivities produced and negotiated through Kahoot gamification?* this study revealed three interconnected themes that illuminate how educator professional subjectivities are shaped through Kahoot gamification, as shown in Figure 2, (1) creating and sharing quiz content; (2) conforming with institutional culture; and (3) infantilizing learners. As explained above, these themes were identified through the thematic analysis of both interview narratives and observational data, offering insight into the complex ways educators construct and negotiate their professional selves through gamified practice.

The findings suggest that Kahoot implementation shapes educator subjectivities in multifaceted ways. While the application enables educators to position themselves as innovative content creators and aligned institutional practitioners, it also introduces professional tensions, particularly regarding perceptions of academic rigor in tertiary education contexts.

Each theme is examined below through rich interview excerpts and observational data, interpreted through the lens of the tripartite framework as shown in Table 1 (Section 1.6). This integrated approach reveals the nuanced ways educators navigate their professional selves while implementing gamified learning approaches. The discussion situates these findings within broader scholarly conversations about professional subjectivity, educational technology and pedagogical innovation in higher education.
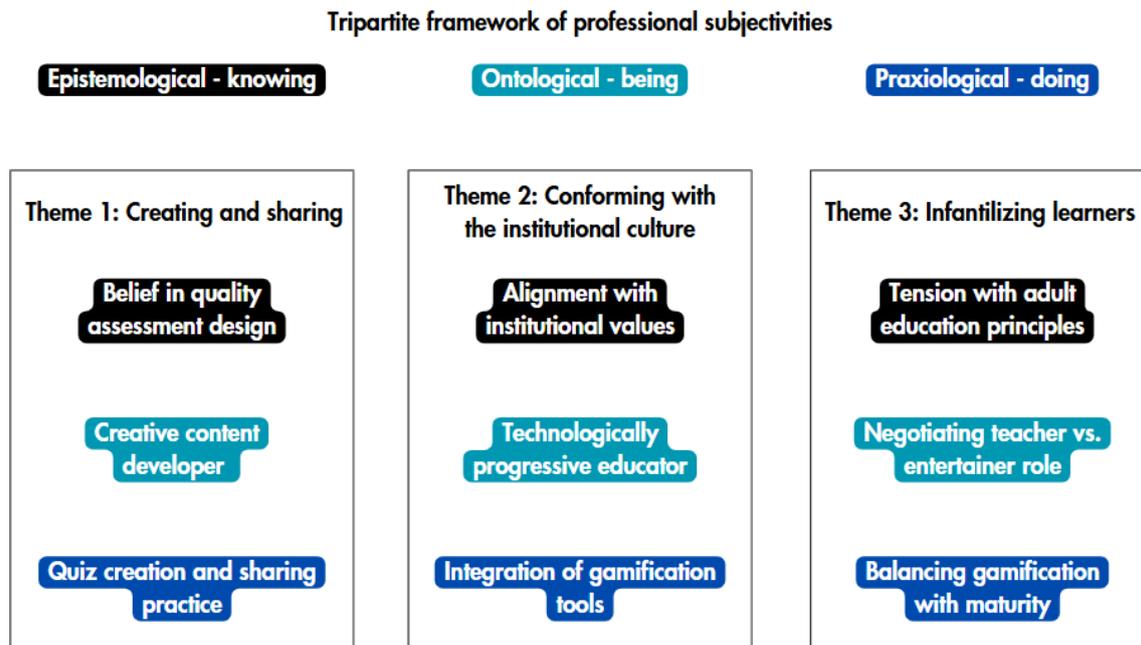
Figure 2. Themes mapped to the tripartite framework of professional subjectivities

3.1.1. Theme 1: Creating and Sharing

The data revealed how the Kahoot platform's functionalities of developing and sharing bespoke quizzes was a rich site of subjectivity enactment for the participants. While the option to use existing Kahoot quizzes through the institution's private repositories was available, generally, the lecturers preferred to create their own activities, reportedly gaining a sense of professionalism and pride from this praxiological aspect. Notably, none of the lecturers mentioned they required additional support to enhance their gamification skills [2]. Rather, the following narrative demonstrates how the enmeshing of the lecturer's skills and the affordances of the Kahoot platform produced an ontologically creative and committed educator:

When I have a sharp focus on a lesson or skill, I want the students to work on, I know I make a wonderful Kahoot. The platform itself is really easy to master, and designing quizzes from scratch is pretty simple. (E5)

In this performance of subjectivity, the praxiological action of creating the Kahoot was salient, and E5's robust epistemological knowing was embedded in their pedagogy to enact agency to position themselves favorably.

Moreover, engaging in the preparatory aspects of gamification permitted the lecturers to perform as collaborative material developers within their department. Two factors drove the practice of original quiz creation: the epistemological belief that existing resources may be substandard; and an altruistic ontological stance reflected in the lecturers' aim to share their activities with colleagues. The following quote reveals how E1 purposefully distanced themselves from others who might be viewed as inept, incapable quiz makers [25]. Moreover, it provides an example of their ontological security in creating valid assessment tools:

At a different college, I was an assessment leader, and it's that some lecturers do not have the right skills to make decent Kahoot quizzes. You know, the distracting answer options need to be diagnostic or analytic, so you can later

figure out what the learners don't understand. However, what I have seen is that other teachers just choose three random answer options without thinking about them really. (E1)

Thus, E1 used Kahoot to reinforce their pedagogical values and occupational experience to create effective quizzes that follow established assessment practice. Similarly, recycling others' content that does not align with the epistemological stance of the educator may invoke an emotional challenge to their professional self, constraining their self-efficacy beliefs and creating some discomfort:

I think it is really hard to use the Kahoots that other faculty have made. What you find is lots of errors and mistakes. This is really embarrassing and represents me in a bad way as an incompetent teacher or one who just doesn't café. It makes me feel discredited and inept through the eyes of my students. (E3)

Explicit dissociation from pre-made materials that malign the image of the professional self has been previously reported [11], and it appears that, as these lecturers' embraced ownership through quiz production, rather than save time, they performed robust and empowered subjectivities [23]. To use others' substandard materials would create a negative ontological shift for them. On the other hand, with universal access to institutional accounts, the benefits of shared folders and repositories enabled the lecturers to redistribute their own content. This digital circulation of Kahoots through the lecturers' actions helped reshape their subjectivities as collaborative and helpful colleagues [31], [32]. This finding is exemplified in the following quotations: *It's really nice and worthwhile to share the Kahoots you make. We're assisting our colleagues: it's good teamwork and collaboration within your department* (E4); and *I think that we should always share the wealth, if you will. Although I don't know exactly what other lecturers are doing or what they might need exactly, are, I always want to help others when I can* (E6). Thus, the personally made Kahoots were effective praxiological tools, which strengthened the creator's professional subjectivity and ontological confidence [2].

3.1.2. Theme 2: Conforming with the Institutional Culture

In addition, the data showed that the lecturers constructed robust subjectivities through aligning their Kahoot teaching approaches with the internal college culture, online teaching practices and student learning preferences. Such alignment, and its relationship with professional subjectivity, has been well documented [33], and the lecturers expressed how their praxiological utilization of Kahoot gamification aligned with the normative, epistemological responsibilities of their teaching duties, for example: *Using Kahoot is strongly pushed by the college … we have the paid version of the account and the college encourages us to take the Bronze, Silver and Gold Kahoot training sessions* (E7); and, *One of our performance objectives is linked to using educational technology. So Kahoot lines up well with that requirement* (E3).

Accordingly, the lecturers' subjectivity was relationally produced partly due to performance evaluation criteria and required PD activities. As they demonstrated their epistemological and pedagogical gamification approach, the lecturers could relay positive subjectivity narratives since their deployment of Kahoot was codified by their respective colleges [25]. This demonstrates how subjectivities appeared to be negotiated accomplishments, subject to occupational directives and the organizational discourse surrounding Kahoot, which is increasingly sedimented in practice [25]:

The culture of using Kahoot here is undeniable. Almost all the lecturers I know here use it to some degree. In fact, even though we use other gamification platforms like Quizziz, it seems that this is the favorite one that we all tend to come back to. You know, I would say that overall, the college leaders and teachers really view it as effective and worthwhile. (E9)

This seemingly universal adoption of Kahoot emerged partly in response to online instruction, where gamification platforms enabled the lecturers to bridge physical distances and maintain pedagogical relationships. As E1 noted, these tools helped the lecturers to negotiate their teaching presence in virtual spaces: *It is good to use it often, to try to connect the learners. This is especially true they're not physically here and studying online.*

The use of Kahoot in virtual spaces appeared to position these lecturers toward effectively responding to the reassembly of academic practice as online learning becomes more sedimented. As E2 noted, *Kahoot is highly beneficial for students. Using their smartphones in the classroom is really key these days and mirrors authentic experiences that they encounter daily.* The use of gamification strategies was also examined epistemologically as a means of PD in the modern digital landscape, while enhancing self-efficacy in alignment with students' real-life experiences: *[Gamification] aligns well with the ways in which young people think, their types of responses and they ways that they study nowadays. I think it is a responsibility of educators to keep up with these changes and embrace them.* (E4)

Relationships with students are believed to exert a significant impact on professional subjectivity formation and its ongoing negotiation [11]. The ubiquity of Kahoot usage in this study also transpired as a response to both tacit and explicit requests from learners. This desire to align praxis with student expectations was paramount in the lecturers' decisions to use Kahoot, revealing their reflective and adaptive subjectivities. In aligning their epistemological beliefs to cultivate a student-centric pedagogy, Kahoot appeared to render meaningful connections with learners: *I have requests to play it, and some ask why we are not doing a Kahoot. They enjoy the challenge and the interface* (E6). This practice positions the educator as a dynamic and proactive agent, capable of performing as an effective teacher, through the normative assumption that most, if not all, learners will respond well to gamification [23]. Similarly, E10 enacted an educator self who strived to diversify their pedagogy to be favorably regarded by learners:

Honesty, I can create a much better impression of myself through my students' eyes if I use methods which they like and appreciate. Many students really enjoy learning through games, and when I put on a Kahoot, I can really see how well they respond to it and value it. (E10)

The praxiological aspect of effective teaching through gamification not only reinforced positive perceptions of the educator's role but also aligned with students' needs. While the lecturers had autonomy to decide when and how frequently to use tools like Kahoot, their decision-making was influenced by multiple factors, including leadership, student expectations, curriculum requirements and technological resources. This theme demonstrates how educators, in coordinating their practice with broader institutional objectives and visions, may whilst perform an ideational, aligned subjectivity [25].

3.1.3. Theme 3: Infantilizing Learners

Although there were clearly substantive opportunities for lecturers to develop effective quizzes and coordinate and align themselves with the institutional culture (as demonstrated in themes 1 and 2), the final theme revealed how Kahoot gamification potentially constrained their professional subjectivities. During the interviews, there were some concerns regarding the potential for excessive Kahoot use to infantilize students and recast educator subjectivities.

Some lecturers struggled with the tension between appealing to students' apparent preferences and potentially patronizing them, leading them to distance themselves from the pro-gamification discourse embedded in the institutional context, as discussed in theme two. This tension was underpinned by the

epistemological understanding that, given their students' conservative upbringing in the Middle Eastern context [34] and developing English language proficiency [35], extensive Kahoot usage risked reducing their ontological, professional educator positioning to one of 'school' teacher. Therefore, several participants reflexively acknowledged the need to recognize their learners as young *adults* and, in doing so, potentially reduce their reliance on Kahoot. E3 explained as follows:

In this kind of higher education context, it is possible to equate low (English) language competence with the perceived maturity of a student. But we need to keep in mind they are still young adults, even if they are not proficient in English or have different cultural views. Basically, there is a danger that Kahoot could be viewed as an unsophisticated, juvenile game if we depend on it too much.

Thus, E3 recognizes this limitation of Kahoot and intimates a future orientation to shifting axiological values and praxiological refinements to Kahoot gamification. Similarly, the following extract suggests that occasionally there is an implicit questioning by some students as to the validity of gamification, bolstering findings [8]:

I really think they appreciate that I do the extra work to make the lecture time more enjoyable. However, the other hand, perhaps they do think at times that "This is college, why are you putting another Kahoot − this is a waste of our educational time." (E9)

When Kahoot is misaligned with some student's perceptions of valid pedagogy, this can reveal the mutability of educator subjectivity in gamification. E9's reflection demonstrated this tension as they vacillated between appealing to learners through the praxiological effort of quiz production, recognizing student cohort diversity and expressing value-based concerns about higher education contexts [36]. Moreover, the lecturers' cautious awareness of potential gamification fatigue through overuse [15] suggested they might need to adjust their praxiological actions to preserve their professional subjectivities. This raises an interesting point about how technology, such as gamification software, might intervene in the relationships between educator and student. In terms of pedagogy, educators may need to reflect on their approaches and seek out new and innovative means of incorporating technology into instructional sessions, to avoid fatigue and to continue to inspire and motivate learners. In this cultural context, where educators' employment status is quite insecure, it may be especially salient to conform to learner preferences to maintain a harmonious teaching and learning environment, which may also contribute to career longevity.

4. CONCLUSION

This study makes a significant contribution to understanding the complex relationship between gamification and educator professional subjectivities in higher education. Through an analysis of knowing, being and doing [2], three distinct yet interconnected themes were identified: creating and sharing; conforming with institutional culture; and infantilizing learners. These findings reveal that Kahoot implementation actively shapes how educators perceive and enact their professional selves, moving beyond simple technology adoption to influence fundamental aspects of professional subjectivity and practice.

The findings highlight how educators achieve epistemological, ontological and praxiological alignment through gamification practice, whether creating innovative content or conforming with institutional priorities. However, critical tensions emerged around the normalization of gamification as an unquestioned teaching approach [37], particularly when implementing game-based learning with young adult students in online environments.

Several practical recommendations emerge. First, educators may design contextually appropriate quizzes while remaining mindful of gamification fatigue, calling upon more experienced colleagues for assistance where necessary [15]. Second, it is suggested that institutions integrate gamification-specific training into their PD frameworks to help educators align their knowing, being and doing with personalized gamification strategies. These PD workshops could include training on how often to utilize gamification strategies, how to construct challenging questions and how to provide constructive feedback to motivate young adult learners. Finally, regular consultation with faculty and students about their experiences with gamification applications may help institutions better support the development of robust professional subjectivities. This could be achieved by surveying faculty members about their experiences, seeking student preferences and encouraging department teams to share exemplars and resources to support successful practices.

This research contributes to broader conversations about educator subjectivity in technology-enhanced learning environments, particularly within culturally diverse settings. As this is a small-scale qualitative study, it does not seek to present broadly generalizable findings. Rather, the objective is to reveal insights that could further academic understandings of subjectivities in a specific institutionally bound context and cohort of educators. Therefore, a limitation of this study, since it pertains to one institution in one geographical location, is that it provides a mere snapshot of the higher education gamification landscape. It is hoped that future studies might examine gamification and educator professional subjectivities in diverse contexts (with varying cultural values) and from multiple institutions. This may also include longitudinal research on how educator subjectivities evolve over time as gamification becomes increasingly embedded in practice and new functionalities are introduced to these applications.

In conclusion, while Kahoot offers valuable opportunities for interactive teaching and learning, its implementation is not neutral. Gamification shapes educator professional subjectivities in a variety of ways and by attending to the complex interplay between knowing, being and doing, institutions are better positioned to support educators' practice, professionalism, and efficacy.

DECLARATIONS

Author Contributions

Natalie-Jane Howard: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Writing – Original Draft. **Elizabeth J. Cook:** Writing – Review & Editing, Visualization. All authors have read and approved the final version of this manuscript.

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Ethical Statement

As this study involved human participants, ethical approval was obtained from the research site's institutional review board prior to data collection. All participants received a detailed information sheet and provided written permission by signing a consent form, for both interviews and observations. The participants were informed they could relinquish their consent at any time if they felt uncomfortable or did not wish to continue.

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The author declares no competing interests.

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