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**THE IMPACT OF
AN AESTHETIC ONLINE COURSE DESIGN TEMPLATE
ON THE LEARNER USER EXPERIENCE**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

Online learning is becoming ubiquitous, and increasing numbers of higher education providers use online delivery, usually managed through learning management systems, as part of their core business of education. A substantial body of literature exists in areas of online learning such as theoretical approaches or general principles of course design. However, there is little research that explores the user experience of online learners accessing their learning through learning management systems, and in particular, how the presentation or layout of the online courses impacts the learner user experience. As a result, online courses are often designed according to the preferences of the individuals responsible for their delivery, rather than as the end result of an evidence-based approach. This mixed-methods study sought to evaluate the impact of a course template, designed to create an aesthetic learning experience, on the learner user experience. The study was conducted in one college of a New Zealand university. Data was collected, using an online questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, from staff facilitating and students enrolled in first-year courses.

Findings indicate that the use of a template that incorporated evidence-based design principles had a significant positive effect on learner user experience. Narrative was shown to be an important aesthetic construct, and the use of the aesthetic template was found to reduce the extraneous cognitive load of courses, increasing learners' sense of engagement and, motivation, and self-efficacy.

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