



# The Mediating Role of Attitudes Towards Psychology of Religion Course in the Relationship Between Theology Students' Levels of Religious Attitude and Finding Meaning in Life

**Ali BİRİNCİ** |  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2958-644x>

Asst. Prof. | Corresponding Author | [alibirinci@gumushane.edu.tr](mailto:alibirinci@gumushane.edu.tr)

Gümüşhane University |  <https://ror.org/00r9t7n55>

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**Şerife ERİCEK MARAŞLIOĞLU** |  <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-5406-0700>

Asst. Prof. | Author | [serife.ericekmaraslioglu@gumushane.edu.tr](mailto:serife.ericekmaraslioglu@gumushane.edu.tr)

Gümüşhane University |  <https://ror.org/00r9t7n55>

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## Abstract

The notion of meaning in life can be defined as the subjective experience that life is valuable and worth living. Research has demonstrated that individuals who possess a strong sense of purpose tend to demonstrate positive coping mechanisms and maintain optimal mental well-being when confronted with adversity. In essence, the presence of meaning in life has been shown to enhance an individual's resilience, thereby mitigating the risk of developing mental health conditions such as pessimism, anxiety, stress, and depression. Religious attitude, on the other hand, shapes an individual's inner and outer life by directing his/her religious feelings, thoughts and behaviors. As a matter of fact, religious attitude plays a strong role in finding resources to solve life problems, finding explanations for stressful life events such as disappointments and frustrations by affecting the individual's level of making sense of life. In a similar manner, the objective of the psychology of religion course is to facilitate comprehension and elucidation of the human condition, encompassing the intricacies of individuals' emotions, cognitions, and behaviours, as well as their interactions with their immediate environment, broader culture, and their spiritual practices. The attainment of this objective is contingent upon the motivations, motives and attitudes of students towards the course. A positive attitude towards the course has been shown to have a significant impact on students' sense of purpose and their religious attitudes. In this context, it is important to investigate the interactional relationship between the levels of making sense of life and religious attitudes of theology faculty students and their attitudes towards the psychology of religion course. The present study aims to determine whether the psychology of religion course exerts a mediating effect on the relationship between the level of religious attitude exhibited by theology faculty students and their ability to find meaning in life. The study group of the research consists of a total of 320 students, 218 female and 102 male, studying at Gümüşhane University Faculty of Theology in the 2023-2024 academic year. The study data were collected using a Personal Information Form, an Attitude Scale towards the Psychology of Religion Course, a Religious Attitude Scale, and Meaning and Purpose of Life Scales. The data were analysed with IBM SPSS Statistics 26 and Amos 24 software packages. The findings indicated a positive relationship between students' religious attitude levels and their levels of finding meaning in life. It can thus be posited that individuals who exhibit pronounced religious attitudes are concomitantly characterised by a propensity to engage in the making of sense of life. The findings further revealed significant positive relationships and interactions between the religious attitudes of theology faculty students and their attitudes towards the psychology of religion course. It is thought that the psychology of religion course can contribute to the individual's efforts to make sense of life by explaining religious feelings, thoughts and behaviours in terms of content and achievement. The study revealed a positive correlation between an individual's attitude towards the psychology of religion course and the level of meaning in their life. Furthermore, it was observed that the attitude towards the psychology of religion course played a mediating role in the relationship between religious attitude and the level of meaning in life. Consequently, all hypotheses determined within the scope of the research were confirmed. The results of the study indicate that attitudes towards the psychology of religion course are significant for undergraduate students' religious attitudes and their sense of life's meaning. In light of these findings, it is recommended that instructors oversee students' attitudes towards the course during the teaching process, enhance course materials and content, and incorporate diversity in terms of methodology.

## Keywords

Religious Education, Psychology of Religion Course, Theology, Attitude, Religious Attitude, Meaning and Purpose of Life

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# İlahiyat Öğrencilerinin Dini Tutum ile Hayatta Anlam Bulma Düzeyleri Arasındaki İlişkide Din Psikolojisi Dersine Yönelik Tutumların Aracı Rolü

**Ali BİRİNCİ** |  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2958-644x>


Dr. Öğr. Üyesi | Sorumlu Yazar | [alibirinci@gumushane.edu.tr](mailto:alibirinci@gumushane.edu.tr)

Gümüşhane Üniversitesi |  <https://ror.org/00r9t7n55>

Din Eğitimi | Gümüşhane, Türkiye

**Şerife ERİCEK MARAŞLIOĞLU** |  <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-5406-0700>

Dr. Öğr. Üyesi | Yazar | [serife.ericekmaraslioglu@gumushane.edu.tr](mailto:serife.ericekmaraslioglu@gumushane.edu.tr)

Gümüşhane Üniversitesi |  <https://ror.org/00r9t7n55>

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## Öz

Hayatın anlamı, bireyin hayatı yaşamaya değer olduğu duygusunu ifade etmektedir. Yapılan çalışmalar hayatta anlam düzeyi yüksek olan bireylerin zorlu yaşam koşulları karşısında olumlu başa çıkarak ruh sağlığını koruduğunu tespit etmiştir. Başka bir ifadeyle hayatta anlam, bireylerin yılmazlık seviyelerini yükselterek karamsarlık, kaygı, stres, depresyon gibi ruhsal rahatsızlıklara sebebiyet verecek duygulardan uzaklaşmasını sağlamaktadır. Dini tutum ise bireyin dini duygularını, düşüncelerini ve davranışlarını yönlendirerek onun içsel ve dışsal yaşantısını şekillendirmektedir. Nitekim dini tutum, bireyin hayatı anlamlandırma düzeyini etkileyerek, yaşamsal sorunları çözmek için kaynaklar bulma, hayal kırıklıkları ve engellenmeler gibi stresli yaşam olayları karşısında açıklamalar getirmekte güçlü bir rol oynar. Din psikolojisi dersi de insanın kendisini (duygu, düşünce ve davranışlarını), çevresini, kültürünü, dini hayatını anlamlandırmayı ve açıklamayı temel amaç edinmiştir. Din psikolojisi dersinin bu amaca ulaşabilmesi, öğrencilerin bu derse yönelik motivasyonları, güdülleri ve tutumlarıyla ilişkilidir. Zira öğrencilerin din psikolojisi dersine yönelik olumlu tutumları hayatı anlamlandırma ve dini tutum düzeylerini etkileyebilir. Bu bağlamda ilahiyat fakültesi öğrencilerinin hayatı anlamlandırma ve dini tutum düzeyleri ile din psikolojisi dersine yönelik tutumları arasındaki etkileşimsel ilişkinin araştırılması önem arz etmektedir. Mevcut araştırma, ilahiyat fakültesi öğrencilerinin dini tutum düzeyleri ve hayatta anlam bulma düzeyleri arasındaki ilişkide din psikolojisi dersinin aracılık etkisinin olup olmadığını tespit etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Araştırma örneklemini 2023-2024 Eğitim-Öğretim yılında Gümüşhane Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesinde öğrenim gören 218'i kadın, 102'si erkek toplam 320 öğrenci oluşturmaktadır. Çalışma verileri Kişisel Bilgi Formu, Din Psikolojisi Dersine Yönelik Tutum Ölçeği, Dini Tutum Ölçeği, Hayatın Anlam ve Amacı Ölçekleri ile toplanmıştır. Veriler IBM SPSS Statistics 26 ve Amos 24 paket yazılım programları ile analiz edilmiştir. Elde edilen bulgulara göre öğrencilerin dini tutum düzeyleri ve hayatta anlam bulma düzeyleri arasında pozitif yönde ilişki olduğu gözlemlenmiştir. Buna göre dini tutum düzeyi yüksek olan bireylerin hayatı anlamlandırma düzeylerinin de yüksek olduğu söylenebilir. İlahiyat fakültesi öğrencilerinin dini tutum ile din psikolojisi dersine yönelik tutumları arasında pozitif yönde anlamlı ilişki ve etkileşimler olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Din psikolojisi dersinin içerik ve kazanım açısından bireyin dini duygu, düşünce ve davranışlarını açıklayarak hayatı anlamlandırma çabalarına katkı sağlayabileceği düşünülmektedir. Araştırmada da din psikolojisi dersine yönelik tutumun hayattaki anlam düzeyini pozitif yönde etkilediği gözlemlenmiştir. Ayrıca din psikolojisi dersine yönelik tutumun, dini tutum ile hayattaki anlam düzeyi arasındaki ilişkide aracılık rolü oynadığı gözlemlenmiştir. Böylece araştırma kapsamında belirlenen tüm hipotezler doğrulanmıştır. Bulguların sonuçlarına göre din psikolojisi dersine yönelik tutumların lisans öğrencilerinin dini tutumları ve hayatı anlamlandırma düzeyleri için önemli olduğunu söylenebilir. Bu bağlamda eğitmenlere, öğretim sürecinde öğrencilerin derse karşı tutumlarını izlemeleri, ders materyalleri ve ders içeriklerini zenginleştirmeleri ve yöntem açısından çeşitliliğe yer verilmeleri önerilmektedir.

## Anahtar Kelimeler

Din Eğitimi, Din Psikolojisi Dersi, İlahiyat, Tutum, Dini Tutum, Hayatın Anlamı ve Amacı

## Atıf

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Etik Bildirim: [ilahiyatdergi@erdogan.edu.tr](mailto:ilahiyatdergi@erdogan.edu.tr)

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Dizinlenme Bilgisi



## Introduction

In the examination of data that illuminates historical periods, including archaeological excavations, mythological and literary narratives, it is evident that religion has existed since the dawn of humanity, playing a pivotal role in the emotional, cognitive and behavioural dimensions of human existence. Psychologists who seek to comprehend the spiritual dimension of human life, have regarded religion as a subject of psychological research from the earliest times (Hökelekli, 2006, 409). Despite the divergent approaches within the field of psychology towards the concept of religion, which range from an affirmative stance to a negative one, it has been demonstrated that psychology and religion have always been intertwined. This relationship has been progressively strengthened over time, reaching its current state of interconnection (Köse, 2006). Although the psychology of religion, which emerged under the leadership of the sciences of history of religions and psychology in the 19th century, has a tradition of at most a hundred years in the West, like many sub-disciplines of the human sciences, it has been taught as a course since the establishment of theology faculties in our country (Holm, 2004, 14; Hökelekli, 2013, 9; Karaca, 2017, 25). Subsequently, on 21 November 1949, at Ankara University Faculty of Theology, the course continued as one course in the second year and two courses in the third year under the designation of psychology of religion (Ulu, 2020, 197).

The content of psychology of religion textbooks includes religious topics such as religion, religiosity, dimensions of religiosity, psychology, mental health, sufi psychology, history of psychology of religion, methods of psychology of religion, psychology of religious development, elements of religious life, psychology of worship and prayer, experience of conversion, religious behaviours. In fact, every event and phenomenon has other meanings in addition to its observable characteristics. The individual strives to discover the secrets of the events and phenomena he sees around him, to evaluate them and to use them for his own benefit. It is education that enables man to achieve this goal (Bilhan, 1991). Therefore, education is an attempt to make sense of life in the sense of preparing the individual for life with his/her experiences and aiming to make sense of and interpret life (Akıncı, 2005, 177; Whitehead, 2024). In terms of its aims, the psychology of religion course is designed to facilitate a deeper understanding of the complex structure of the individual's feelings, thoughts and behaviours.

The course also seeks to analyse the motives (internal motives, external motives) that affect the religious life of the individual and others, and to facilitate a more nuanced understanding of these motives. Concurrently, it fosters the student's capacity to cultivate positive relationships with their immediate environment (mother, father, child, spouse, etc.). Furthermore, it is a prerequisite for success in professional careers, such as imam or muezzin roles within the Presidency of Religious Affairs, as well as teaching positions in institutions affiliated with the Ministry of National Education. The field of psychology of religion is inherently interdisciplinary, drawing upon the findings of related fields such as psychology, philosophy and sociology, which focus on human and social life. Consequently, students who successfully complete the course will have developed the ability to analyse the impact of religion on the individual, as well as to recognise the socio-cultural, intellectual, psychological and physical developmental characteristics of the individual in question. Moreover, they will be able to address these characteristics according to the specific period in question. These are some of the key concepts that students will have gained from studying the psychology of religion (Kayıklık, 2003, 83-102).

The transfer of the objectives and achievements of the psychology of religion course to the individual is related to the student's attitudes towards the course. Because it is possible to transfer information to the individual in accordance with the aims and achievements of the course and to make him/her knowledgeable about certain subjects. However, the fact that knowledge can go beyond knowing and become part of the individual's feelings and thoughts is realised through the individual's interpretation and use of this knowledge, which is related to the student's attitude (Özden, 2020). Therefore, it is not possible to assert that every student will develop an identical attitude towards the psychology of religion course. Research findings indicate that the attitudes of students towards the psychology of religion course are influenced by various factors, including the instructors, the course subjects, and the methods and materials employed in the course delivery (Yüksel-Kızılgöçer 2021). Indeed, as human beings are distinguished by their capacity for self-awareness, deliberate behaviour modification, and emotional expression, they consequently develop varied attitudes towards the facts and events that surround them. Attitude, a concept in social psychology that is acquired through learning (Morgan, 2014, 382), is defined as a partially permanent intellectual, emotional and behavioural latent tendencies attributed to an individual and related to psychological phenomena, individuals or events in their environment (Kağıtçıbaşı-Camelcılar, 2015; Plotnik-Kouyoumdjian, 2011, 588; Baysal, 1981, 121; Hogg-Vaughan, 2010, 154).

For a tendency to be considered an attitude, it is necessary that it consists of three elements: cognitive, emotional and

behavioural. The cognitive element consists of the thoughts, knowledge and beliefs that people form towards the attitude object. The affective element encompasses the feelings, emotions and excitement experienced towards the attitude object, i.e. whether the individual holds a positive or negative sentiment towards the object. The behavioural element, finally, encompasses all actions related to the attitude object (Plotnik-Kouyoumdjian, 2011, 588-589; Atkinson vd., 2013, 164-165). When the psychology of religion course is considered as an attitude object, the student's positive or negative ideas and beliefs about the course show the cognitive element; liking or disliking the course shows the emotional element; rejecting the course or showing interest in the course and learning the subjects shows the behavioural element.

Attitudes are postulated to exist at two distinct levels post-development. The first is conscious attitudes, which can be readily elucidated; the second is involuntary attitudes, which occasionally involve unconscious evaluations (Atkinson vd., 2013, 169). When the dynamics of the attitudes developed by people are religious in origin, this is designated as a religious attitude. A religious attitude can be defined as "a person's way of determining his/her thoughts, feelings and behaviours about religion, whether pro or con" (Peker, 2013, 147). As with other attitudes, religious attitudes consist of three elements (Plotnik-Kouyoumdjian, 2011, 588). The cognitive element of religious attitudes includes religious beliefs, thoughts and knowledge of the individual. The emotional component of religious attitudes encompasses the internal emotional responses experienced by the individual, while the behavioural component encompasses all the action processes driven by religious dynamics, such as worship and religious practices (Kula, 2006, 513). An individual's religious attitude is influenced by various factors, including familial influences, religious education, the environment, mass media, and the behaviours of religious individuals in their vicinity (Peker, 2013, 152-156). In this context, it can be posited that the development of a positive attitude towards religion leads to an approach towards the subject and subsequent organisation of life in accordance with religious principles. Conversely, the development of a negative attitude results in a departure from religion and the organisation of life according to different principles (Kaya, 1998, 54). In other words, since the religious attitudes developed are central, people shape their decisions and behaviours, in short, their lives according to these attitudes (Aydın, 2017, 90; Şirin, 2017, 65-88). The studies carried out show that there is an interrelation between attitudes towards religion and attitudes towards the religious course and the teacher of this course. (Kaya, 2001, 45).

Another significant variable for this study is the concept of the meaning of life. Indeed, the pursuit of meaning and truth has been a fundamental aspect of the human condition since the earliest recorded history. This is driven by human beings' inability to tolerate the absence of purpose and meaning in their lives, which they attempt to address by establishing new foundational concepts (Armstrong, 1998, 494). It can be posited that the desire to comprehend the rationale behind one's own existence, the universe within which one is situated, and the truth has been a constant aspect of the human condition (Bahadır, 2002, 7). At the basis of this desire is the existential drive (Bahadır, 2002, 56), the desire to live a good life, the unconscious relationships of the individual (James, 2017), the desire for self-realisation (Maslow, 2019), the desire to get rid of uncertainty and closedness, to gain clarity and recognition, to anticipate and control their personal and social environment (Hökelekli, 2010, 59), as well as the existential desire to devote oneself to a purpose and to live a meaningful life (Bahadır, 2002, 56). Indeed, the endeavour to comprehend the world in which they reside and their encounters as components of their cognitive processes (Geertz, 2020) exerts an influence on the mental well-being of individuals (Steger, 2005, 574-582; Karaca, 2017, 115). At the same time, meaning in life provides individuals with a sense of coherence in the face of life events and a sense of purpose and direction in life (King - Hicks, 2021). For instance, individuals who perceive their lives as devoid of meaning are prone to pessimism and face challenges in achieving meaningful objectives, or these objectives hold little significance for them. Concurrently, pessimism has been demonstrated to engender existential emptiness and to precipitate a range of adverse emotional states, including meaninglessness, dissatisfaction and restlessness. Consequently, the manifestation of maladaptive behaviours, including aggression, depression and suicide, becomes a probable outcome (Fahlman vd., 2009, 309). In summary, the pursuit of meaning in life, a fundamental existential drive, entails self-knowledge through the comprehension of external events, phenomena, and objects (Frankl, 2018, 156). This is a challenging process, but it makes life easier because it provides self-regulatory strategies to give meaning to life and facilitate decision making (George - Park, 2016). This process involves the development of distinctive behaviours that serve to actualise one's life purpose (Adler, 2019, 8).

In addressing the question of the meaning of life, various religious doctrines have offered perspectives on the human search for meaning and the enigmatic nature of existence (Chamberlain - Zika, 1992). To elaborate further, religions can serve as a significant source of interpretation, in conjunction with philosophy and science, to comprehend events such as adversity, loss, and challenges, and to address fundamental questions concerning existence.<sup>1</sup> The healthy fulfilment of the inherent human need to believe has been

<sup>1</sup> According to Buddhism, the purpose of life is to reach Nirvana, which lies beyond the universe. According to Hinduism, the purpose of life is the order of the universe and adherence to the cosmic laws of nature that ensure spiritual development. According to the Abrahamic religions, the universe was created by Allah for a purpose. See al-Zāriyāt, al-Mulk, al-Baqarah, 2/155

demonstrated to have a significant impact on the level and nature of the meaning individuals ascribe to their lives. For example, in a study conducted on a sample of students, it was found that the level of religious attitudes positively predicted finding meaning in life (Karşlı, 2020, 197; Şentürk-Yakut, 2014, 45-60; Kartopu, 2013, 67-90; Kırac, 2013, 165-178). In a study conducted on a sample of patients with chronic kidney disease, it was found that faith positively predicted meaning in life and increased psychological resilience in patients (Moura et al., 2020). Another study conducted on a sample of university students in Ghana found a positive dynamic relationship between religious commitment and meaning of life (Wilson et al., 2022). A study conducted on Turkish students confirmed the existence of a direct positive relationship between individual religious attitudes and the meaning and purpose of life (Aydın, 2017, 102)

When examining the existing literature, it can be observed that religion provides answers to questions about the meaning of life (Abeyta - Routledge, 2018). The meaning of life, as a eudaimonic aspect of well-being, refers to the extent to which an individual perceives their life to be meaningful, purposeful and valuable (Steger et al., 2006). Frankl (2018), the theorist of Logotherapy, emphasises that people search for meaning in life and that the meaning of life forms the basis of their motivation for behaviour. The search for meaning is an intrinsic component of human motivation, characterised by its perpetual dynamism and universality (Morgan - Farsides, 2009). A substantial body of research has identified the significance of the meaning of life, a positive psychological resource, in promoting mental and physical well-being. Studies have demonstrated its association with factors such as life satisfaction (Park et al., 2010), anxiety (Breitbart et al., 2010), and depression (Mascaro-Rosen, 2005). Indeed, the quest for meaning in life has been identified as one of the most potent sources of motivation, offering hope during periods of adversity (Frankl, 2018; Park, 2010).

Many studies on different samples have shown that religion can be a powerful source of meaning for individuals to make sense of important stressful processes by providing social and psychological resources such as perseverance, struggle, social support, locus of control, encouragement for a healthy lifestyle and hope (Park, 2007; Koenig, 2009; Ayten, 2010; Kartopu, 2013; Yapıcı, 2017; Karakaş - Koç, 2014). In this context, the factors that influence the direction of an individual's religious attitude have been the main focus of research. Research in this area has focused on a number of factors such as the needs and desires of the individual, parents, social environment, religious groups, religious education, clergy and the behaviour of religious individuals (Peker, 2013, 152-157; Arslan, 2009). For example, in studies conducted among non-clinical students, participants who received religious education were found to have higher levels of religious attitudes (Kavas, 2013; Apaydın, 2001; Gül - Dam, 20-21). Similarly, studies conducted on the first adult sample found that participants who graduated from theological faculties and received religious education had higher levels of religious attitudes (Doğan, 2007; Kerimov, 2020). Do attitudes towards the psychology of religion course, which is an important element of theological education, play an interactive role in the relationship between religious attitudes and meaning in life? In the literature review, it was noted that no research has been conducted to include attitudes towards the psychology of religion course in the research and to determine its effect. However, people often think that questions of meaning are primarily theological or philosophical and may not realise that these questions are psychological. While the psychology of religion aims to explain individuals' motivations for religious manifestations in their behaviour, thoughts, and life experiences, it also aims to reveal what events and phenomena represent and what their implications and connections are (Hood et al., 2009; Holm, 2004; Paloutzian, 2016). As part of these objectives, several acquisitions have been made for the psychology of religion course. Some of these are: "Know the psycho-social functions of religion.", "Can observe the effects of religion on people and interpret them by making comparisons.", "Recognise the place, meaning and importance of religion in the life of the individual.", "Understand the importance of the religious factor in protecting the mental health of the individual.", "Make an evaluation about the effects of religious belief and life on the personality with its positive and negative aspects." (Yüksel - Kızılgeçit, 2021). These achievements and objectives of the psychology of religion enable individuals to understand the importance of religion in human life and its impact on their own lives, and the effectiveness of the psychology of religion course in shaping individuals' religious attitudes can be determined (see Arslan, 2009). At the same time, in the content of textbooks taught in psychology of religion, topics such as the definition of the concepts of religion and religiosity, the origins of religion, the dimensions of religiosity, and the ways in which the phenomenon of religion helps people to cope with stressful processes (Pargament, 1997; Paloutzian, 2016) can help believers to shape their religious attitudes and make sense of events and phenomena within the content of religion. A survey of extant literature reveals studies that address the content of the psychology of religion (Clark, 1961) and the motivators of belief (Kayıklık, 2002, 27-40). Concurrently, it has been ascertained that there are studies which encompass the needs and objectives of the psychology of religion course in the faculties of theology. Such studies include the explanation of various aspects of religious life (Aydın, 2011, 109-113; Fırat, 1989, 33-44; Yavuz, 1982, 87-108), the facilitation of people recognising and understanding themselves and other people (Yüksel-Kızılgeçit, 2021; Allport, 1950; Yenen, 2016). This research is significant in its revelation that the attitudes of theology



faculty students towards the psychology of religion course have a discernible impact on their ability to comprehend life's events, facilitating the development of a healthy mindset and fostering resilience in the face of challenging circumstances. The modelling undertaken has confirmed the efficacy of the content of the psychology of religion course, in conjunction with religious attitude, in addressing the challenges encountered by students in life.

### Subject, Objective and Hypotheses

The research topic of this study is the relationship between students' religious attitude levels and meaning in life and the mediating effect of students' attitude towards the psychology of religion course in this relationship. In this context, the questions "What is the relationship between students' religious attitude levels and the meaning and purpose of life" and "Do students' attitudes towards the psychology of religion course mediate the relationship between these two variables?" constitute the main problem of the study. The aim of this study is to test a mediation model in which attitude towards the psychology of religion course is the mediating variable in the relationship between religious attitude and meaning in life based on the related theory and previous research findings. In such a model, it is thought that religious attitude affects attitude towards the psychology of religion course and attitude towards the psychology of religion course affects the theology students' meaning in life levels more. In other words, the effect of religious attitude on the level of meaning in life increases through the attitude towards the psychology of religion course variable. In this context, the hypotheses to be tested by the research based on the related literature review are stated below:

H<sub>1</sub>: Religious attitude positively affects the level of meaning in life.

H<sub>2</sub>: Religious attitude positively affects the attitude towards the psychology of religion course.

H<sub>3</sub>: Attitude towards the psychology of religion course positively affects the level of meaning in life.

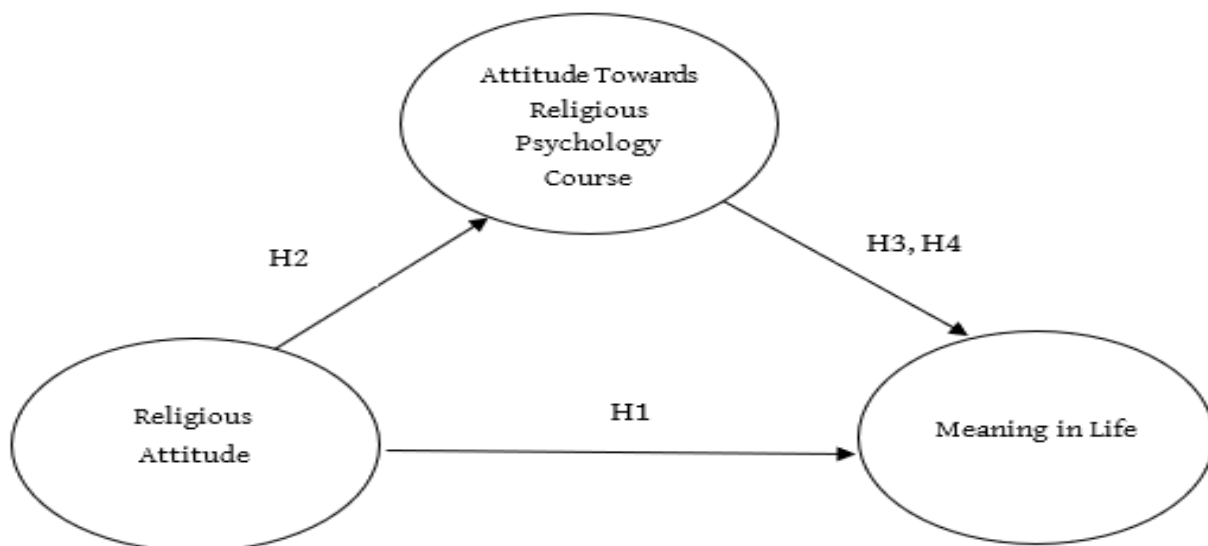
H<sub>4</sub>: Attitude towards the psychology of religion course mediates the relationship between religious attitude and meaning in life.

### Method

#### The Model of Research

This research, which aims to investigate the effect of the theology students' religious attitudes and attitudes towards the psychology of religion course on their level of meaning in life, was carried out in the relational survey model. In this context, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), which is frequently used in correlational studies due to its capacity to examine predictive relationships simultaneously, was used to reveal the predictive relationships between variables (Fraenkel vd., 2012). Structural equation modeling (SEM) is a general term used to describe multivariate statistical analyses that are a combination of factor analysis and regression analysis. They are typically used to test models that include both observed and latent variables (Byrne, 2016, 3; Karagöz, 2017, 453).

**Figure 1:** Mediated Research Model to be Tested



### Sample (Participants)

The study population (Şahin-Karakuş, 2019, 202) consisted of students enrolled in the Faculty of Theology at Gümüşhane University during the 2023–2024 academic year. Using purposive sampling, the study sample comprised 320 students who had completed the psychology of religion course. Among these participants, 68.1% (n = 218) were female, and 31.9% (n = 102) were male. Participants ranged from second-year to fourth-year students.

**Table 1.** Descriptive Data about the Participants of Study

	Variable	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	218	68,1
	Male	102	31,9
	Total	320	100
Age	18-21	31	9,7
	22-24	238	74,4
	25 and above	51	15,9
	Total	320	100
Class Level	2nd Yea	82	25,6
	3rd Year	121	37,8
	4th Year	117	36,6
	Tota	320	100

### Data Collection Instruments

*Ok-Religious Attitude Scale:* The Scale, developed by Ok, is designed to assess the cognitive, behavioral, emotional, and relational dimensions of religious attitudes, including an individual's relationship with God. The scale employs a five-point Likert format, with responses ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree". It is comprised of eight items, comprising six positive items and two negative items, distributed across four underlying factors. Scores range from a minimum of 8 to a maximum of 40, where higher scores indicate stronger religious attitudes, and lower scores suggest weaker religious attitudes (Ok, 2011, 528-549). The psychometric properties of the scale were re-evaluated in this study. The results confirmed the scale's four-factor structure and demonstrated excellent model fit indices (RMSEA = .003, SRMR = .002, CFI = .99,  $\chi^2/df$  = 1.18). Additionally, the internal consistency of the scale, as measured by Cronbach's alpha, was calculated at 0.75, indicating acceptable reliability.

*Attitude Scale Toward the Psychology of Religion Course:* Designed by Akyıldız and Kahveci, this instrument assesses attitudes toward the psychology of religion course across three dimensions: importance, interest, and avoidance. The scale includes 20 items, with responses rated on a five-point Likert scale from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree" (Akyıldız-Kahveci, 2022, 1265-1292). Psychometric analyses revealed satisfactory fit indices (RMSEA = .007, SRMR = .005, CFI = .93,  $\chi^2/df$  = 2.58), and its internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach's Alpha) was 0.96.

*Meaning and Purpose of Life Scale:* Developed by Aydın et al., this scale measures individuals' ability to find meaning and purpose in life. It consists of 17 items, including 11 positive and 6 negative items, scored on a five-point Likert scale (Aydın, 2015, 39-55). The scale exhibited acceptable model fit indices (RMSEA = .007, SRMR = .006, CFI = .91,  $\chi^2/df$  = 2.39) and a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.96, indicating high reliability.

### Procedure

The data collection process was conducted in person using a paper-and-pencil method. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee of Gümüşhane University (Approval Date: March 27, 2024; Approval Number: 2024/3). Participants completed the questionnaires voluntarily, with an average completion time of approximately 10 minutes. Twelve incomplete or improperly filled forms were excluded from the dataset. The data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 26 and AMOS 24 software. The dataset was examined for normality, with skewness and kurtosis values falling within the acceptable range of -1.5 to +1.5 (George-Mallery, 2020, 114). Outliers were identified and removed using Mahalanobis distance, resulting in the exclusion of five cases. Descriptive statistics were calculated for each variable, and SEM was employed to test the hypothesized relationships. Model fit indices, such as RMSEA, SRMR, and CFI, were used to assess the adequacy of the models.

**Table 2:** Descriptive Statistics for Research Variables

Variable	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation	Median	Skewness	Kurtosis
Religious Attitude	320	3,38	5,00	4,54	0,33	4,62	-,529	-,176
Religious Attitude - Cognitive	320	4,00	5,00	4,79	0,37	5,00	-1,380	,286
Religious Attitude - Emotional	320	2,50	5,00	4,42	0,53	4,41	-,529	,013
Religious Attitude - Behavioral	320	2,50	5,00	4,31	0,53	4,00	-,124	-,490
Religious Attitude - Relational	320	3,00	5,00	4,66	0,46	5,00	-1,067	,118
Psychology of Religion	320	2,65	5,00	4,02	0,54	4,03	-,153	-,565
Importance of Psychology of Religion	320	3,00	5,00	4,34	0,46	4,17	-,002	-,737
Interest in Psychology of Religion	320	1,69	5,00	3,62	0,75	4,69	-,185	-,297
Avoidance in Psychology of Religion	320	2,17	5,00	4,09	0,67	4,08	-,512	-,184
Meaning and Purpose of Life	320	2,05	5,00	3,84	0,55	3,82	-,143	-,251
The meaningfulness of life	320	3,09	5,00	4,17	0,41	4,18	-,054	-,152
The meaninglessness of life	320	1,00	5,00	3,48	0,83	3,50	-,213	-,391

## Results

In this section of the study, descriptive and relational analyses of the participants' scores on the scales of Religious Attitude, Attitude Towards Psychology of Religion and Meaning and Purpose of Life were included. In this context, the arithmetic mean and standard deviation levels of the participants were determined and tested with the Equation Model between variables.

**Table 3:** The Descriptive Statistics for Theology Students' Religious Attitudes, Attitudes Towards The Psychology of Religion Course, and Their Level Of Meaning in Life

Dimension	N	$\bar{X}$	SS
Religious Attitude	320	4,54	0,33
Attitude Towards the Psychology of Religion Course	320	4,02	0,54
Level of Meaning in Life	320	3,84	0,55

When analysing the descriptive statistics of the theology students' attitudes towards religion and psychology of religion and their level of meaning in life in Table 3, it is found that the mean score of religious attitude is ( $\bar{X}=4.54$ ), the mean score of attitude towards the psychology of religion is ( $\bar{X}=4.02$ ) and the mean score of level of meaning in life is ( $\bar{X}=3.84$ ). Considering the arithmetic means of the research variables, it can be said that the mean scores of the theology students in the sample are at a "very high level".

## The Relationship Between Religious and Psychology of Religion Attitudes and the Level of Meaning in Life

Pearson Product Moment Correlation was employed to ascertain the correlation between the attitudes of students enrolled in the Faculty of Theology towards religion and psychology of religion and their levels of meaning in life. The results are presented in Table 4.

**Table 1.** The Relationship between Participants' Religious and Psychology of Religion Attitudes and Their Level of Meaning in Life

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1-IPR	1											
2- IntPR	,654**	1										
3-AvPR	,537**	,649**	1									
4-PR	,804**	,911**	,861**	1								
5-RA-C	,176**	,190**	,322**	,269**	1							
6-RA-A	,210**	,161**	,241**	,232**	,220**	1						
7-RA-B	,133*	,205**	,202**	,215**	,151**	,381**	1					



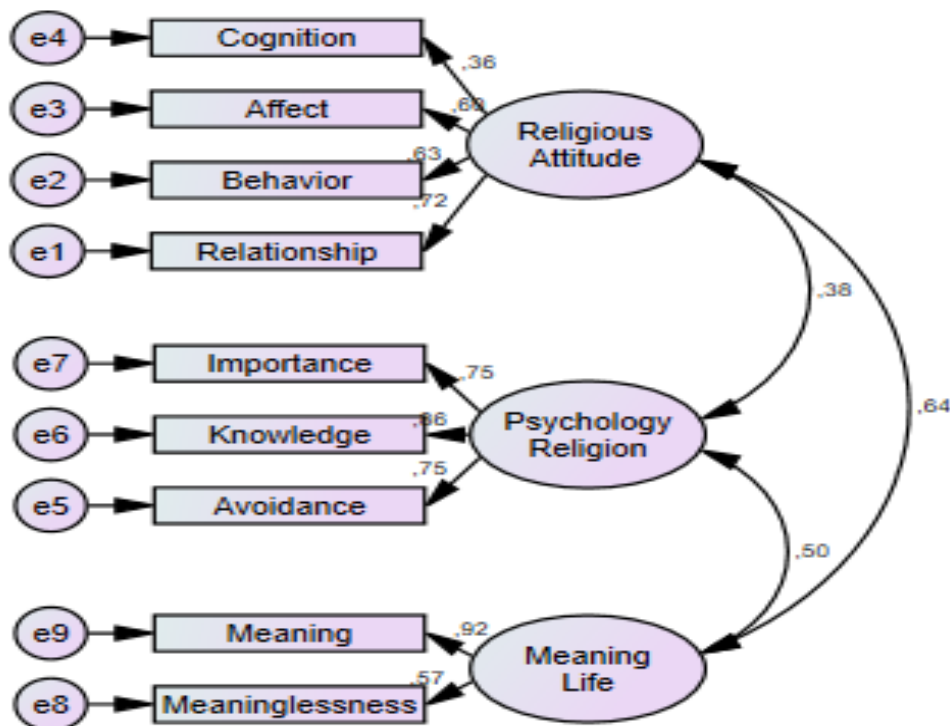
8-RA-R	,177**	,152**	,235**	,217**	,222**	,449**	,463**	1	
9-RA	,245**	,249**	,345**	,326**	,497**	,762**	,749**	,768**	1
10- MPL-F	,260**	,256**	,335**	,329**	,201**	,151**	,196**	,226**	,271**
11-MPL-L	,368**	,358**	,368**	,420**	,318**	,323**	,382**	,413**	,509**
12- MPL	,333**	,326**	,390**	,404**	,270**	,234**	,289**	,324**	,393**

**Note:**  $p < .01$ . RA = Religious Attitude; PR = Psychology of Religion ; MPL= Meaning and Purpose of Life

Based on the findings, as shown in Table 4, a moderate positive and statistically significant relationship was identified between participants' religious attitudes and their average scores for the level of meaning in life ( $r = 0.393$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This indicates that as theology students' religious attitude scores increase, their level of meaning in life scores also increase. When the coefficient of determination is considered ( $r^2 = 0.15$ ), it can be inferred that approximately 15% of the variance in the level of meaning in life can be explained by religious attitudes. Similarly, a moderate positive and statistically significant relationship was observed between theology students' attitudes toward the psychology of religion course and their level of meaning in life scores ( $r = 0.404$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The coefficient of determination ( $r^2 = 0.16$ ) indicates that approximately 16% of the variability in the level of meaning in life can be explained by attitude towards the psychology of religion course. These findings suggest that religious attitude and attitude towards psychology of religion course are significant variables affecting the level of meaning in life of theology students.

Following the identification of significant correlations between attitudes towards religion and psychology of religion course and the level of meaning in life, the predictive effect of attitudes towards religion and the psychology of religion course on the level of meaning in life was evaluated using structural equation modelling with the IBM AMOS 24 program. In order to test the measurement model, which consists of variables pertaining to religious attitude, attitude towards the psychology of religion course, and level of meaning in life, the hypotheses of the study were taken into account. Given that the data exhibited a normal distribution, a covariance matrix was constructed using the Maximum Likelihood calculation method. The analysis yielded satisfactory values for the fit indices, thereby confirming the measurement model ( $\chi^2 [24, N=320]=55.39$ ;  $p < .01$ ;  $\chi^2/df=2.30$ ; CFI=.96; SRMR=.005; RMSEA = .006).

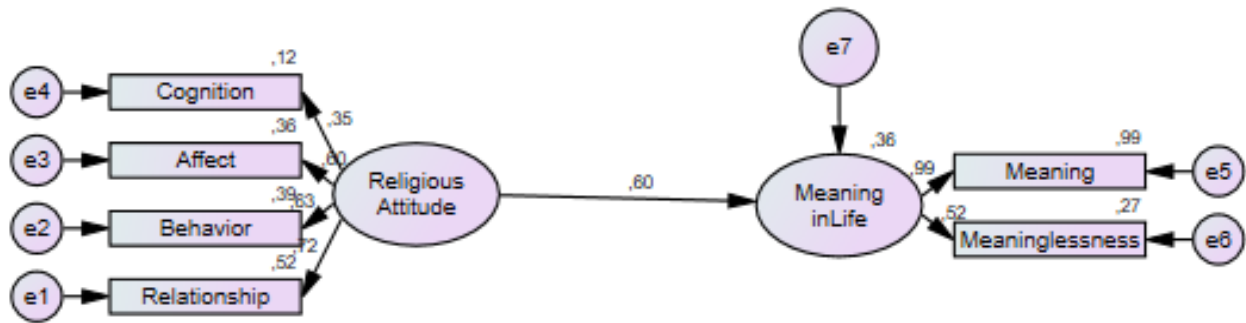
**Figure 2:** Measurement Model



Following the validation of the measurement model, the research hypotheses were tested through the latent variable structural model. The results of the analyses are presented in Table 5.

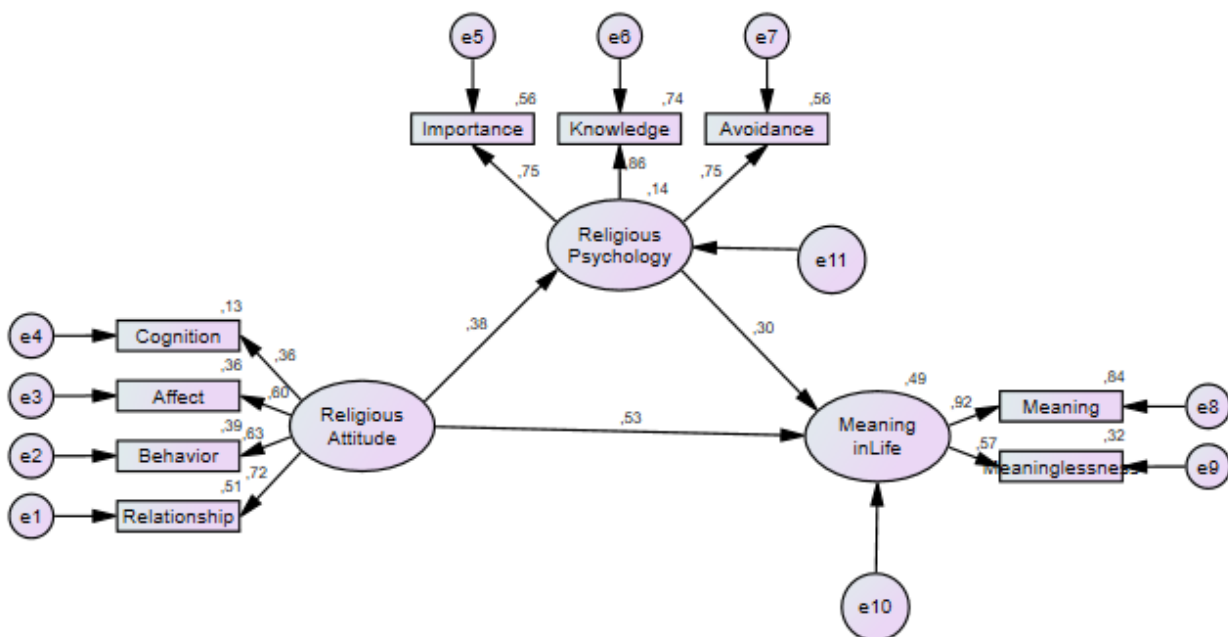
Firstly, in order to test the hypothesis H1 (Religious Attitude  $\longrightarrow$  Level of Meaning in Life), the latent variable structural model in which religious attitude is exogenous and the level of meaning in life is endogenous was tested. The fit indices obtained indicated that the measurement model was validated ( $\chi^2 [8, N=320]=13.14$ ;  $p < .01$ ;  $\chi^2/df=1.64$ ; CFI= .99; SRMR= .003; RMSEA = .005). The results of the structural equation model (SEM) indicated that religious attitude was a significant predictor of the level of meaning in life ( $\beta = .60$ ;  $p < .01$ ). In this case, H1 was supported.

**Figure 3:** Standardized Path Diagram for Hypothesis H1



In order to test the other hypotheses of the study, an additional model was established in which attitudes toward the the psychology of religion course were included as a mediating variable (see Figure 4). According to the results of the the mediation model, religious attitude significantly predicted attitudes toward the psychology of religion course ( $\beta = .38$ ;  $p < .01$ ). In this case, H2 was supported. Similarly, the effect of the mediating variable, attitudes toward the psychology of religion course on the level of meaning in life was also found to be significant ( $\beta = .30$ ;  $p < .01$ ), thereby supporting H3. However, even when attitudes toward the psychology of religion course were included as a mediating variable in the model, the path coefficient from religious attitude to the level of meaning in life remained significant ( $\beta = .53$ ;  $p < .01$ ). Religious attitude, together with attitude towards the psychology of religion course, explained 49% of the change (variance) in the level of meaning in life. The fit indices obtained from the path analysis were within the acceptable threshold values reported in the literature, indicating that the model was compatible with the data and acceptable overall ( $\chi^2 [24, N = 320] = 55.39$ ;  $p < .01$ ;  $\chi^2/df = 2.30$ ; CFI = 0.96; RMSEA = 0.06; SRMR = 0.005).

**Figure 4:** Standardized Path Diagram of the Structural Model



Path analysis based on the bootstrap method was conducted to test whether the attitude towards the psychology of religion course has a mediating role in the relationship between religious attitude and the level of meaning in life. Since the bootstrap method gives more reliable results than Baron and Kenny's traditional approach and Sobel test, the 5000 resampling option was preferred in the bootstrap analysis (Darlington ve Hayes, 2016, 456-457; Gürbüz ve Bayık, 2021, 2; Hayes ve Rockwood, 2017, 44). According to Gürbüz, "In mediation effect analyses conducted with the Bootstrap technique, the 95% confidence interval (CI) values obtained as a result of the analysis should not include zero (0) value in order to support the research hypothesis" (Gürbüz, 2021, 122).

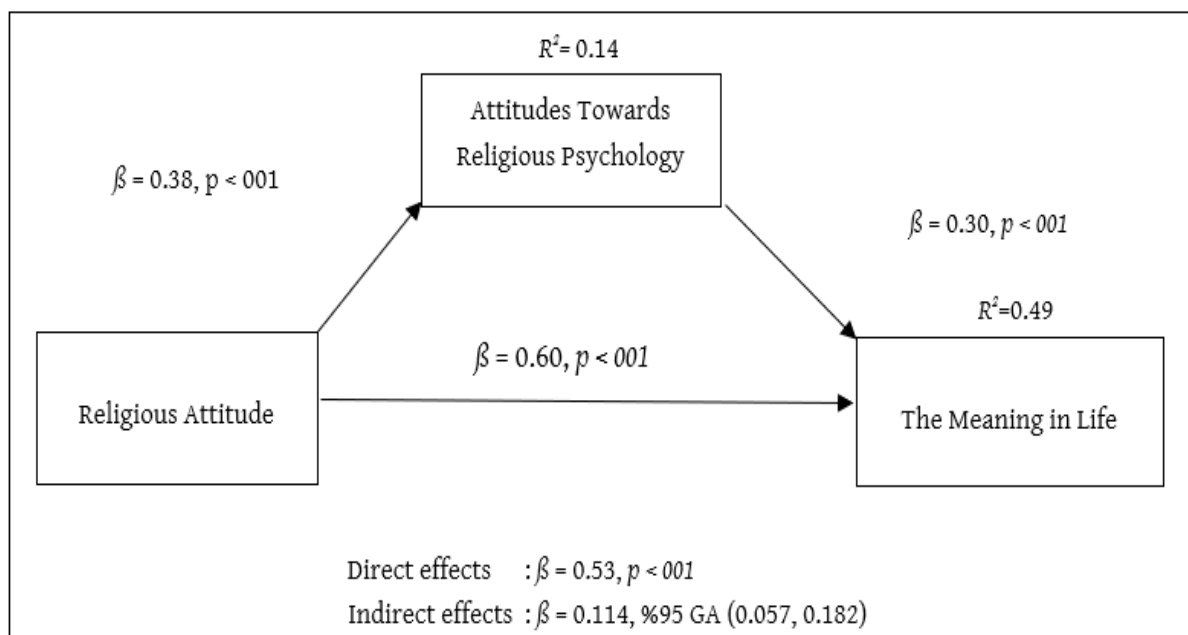
According to the Bootstrap results, the indirect effect of religious attitude on the level of meaning in life through attitude towards psychology of religion was found to be significant ( $\beta = .114$ , 95% CI [0.057, 0.182]). This is because the Bootstrap lower and upper confidence interval values obtained with the percentile method do not include the value 0 (zero). These results show that attitude towards psychology of religion course has a mediating effect on the relationship between religious attitude and the level of meaning in life. In this case, H4 is supported.

**Table 5.** Results of Structural Model Analysis (N=320)

Prediction Variables	Outcome Variables			
	Attitude towards the psychology of religion		The level of meaning in life	
	$\beta$	SH	$\beta$	SH
Religious attitude (c pathway)	-	-	0.60***	0.088
$R^2$	-	-	0.36	-
Religious attitude (a pathway)	0.38***	0.80	-	-
$R^2$	0.14	-	-	-
Religious attitude (c pathway)	-	-	0.53***	0.087
Attitude towards the psychology of religion (b path)	-	-	0.30***	0.069
$R^2$	-	-	0.49	-
Indirect effect	-	-	0.114, (0.057, 0.182)	-

Notes: \*p < .05; \*\* p < .01; \*\*\* p < .001. SH= Standard error; Values in parentheses are upper and lower confidence intervals. Bootstrap resampling = 5000.

**Figure 5:** Results of SEM Analysis



Note: Standardized beta coefficient values are reported.  $R^2$  values indicate variance explained. CI: Confidence interval.

## Conclusion

The objective of the present study is to ascertain whether attitudes towards the psychology of religion course mediate the relationship between religious attitude and meaning in life in a sample of university students. To this end, the study encompassed 320 university students. The results obtained within the scope of the study indicated that the attitude towards the psychology of religion course functions as a mediating variable in the relationship between the level of religious attitude and the level of finding meaning in life. The results of the mediation model test demonstrated that the effect of religious attitude on the level of meaning in life is increased through the variable of attitude towards the psychology of religion course. In this context, all hypotheses of the research were confirmed.

The present study's findings are consistent with extant literature on the subject, indicating the impact of religious attitude on the meaning of life. The positive interaction between these variables underscores the explanatory influence of religion. Consequently, the hypothesis that "Religious attitude positively affects the level of meaning in life" was corroborated. This finding serves to validate the initial hypothesis ( $H_1$ ). A substantial body of research has established a positive correlation between religious attitude and the quest for meaning in life (Karlı, 2020; Kırac, 2013; Park, 2005). This phenomenon can be attributed to the assumption of a central role by religion in providing an individual with a sense of safety and security, and in imparting a sense of meaning and purpose to life (Park, 2005). In other words, religion assumes an important meaning system in existential matters and in terms of increasing the power to live in the face of life-threatening events and protecting mental health by keeping emotions such as patience, hope and sacrifice active (Kartopu, 2013, 81; Karakaş-Koç, 2014, 515; Pour-Hojjati, 2015, 60). Therefore, religious attitudes, which play a significant role in the interpretation of life, also influence the emotions, reflections, and behaviours of the individual. Studies in the literature emphasise that the importance attached to the meaning of life plays an important role in one's ability to cope with difficulties and stressful situations by positively influencing mental states such as life satisfaction (Park et al., 2010), anxiety (Breitbart et al., 2010) and depression (Mascaro - Rosen, 2005) (Kavas, 2013, 146; Krause et al., 2017, 286-293; Krok, 2016, 31,42).

The students' attitudes towards the psychology of religion course are of significance for the realisation of the objectives and achievements of the course. Students who are interested in the course, have positive attitudes, and take an active role in the teaching of the course will be successful and achieve the targeted outcomes of the course. In line with the data of the study, the hypothesis  $H_2$ , "Religious attitude positively affects the attitude towards the psychology of religion course", was confirmed. These results are consistent with the findings of various empirical studies indicating that individuals with high levels of religious attitude have high attitudes towards the psychology of religion course (Kaya, 2001). Within the scope of the present study, it can be posited that religious education exerts an influence on such outcomes (Hökelekli, 1986, 47; Hayta, 2000, 502). The majority of students enrolled in the Faculty of Theology have graduated from Imam Hatip High School where religious education is intense. Consequently, it can be posited that religious education fosters heightened levels of religious commitment and enthusiasm for religious courses. This phenomenon has been corroborated by numerous studies (Aydın, 2017, 99; Apaydın, 2001, 112-113; Düzgüner-Sevinç, 2020, 65; Gencer, 2020, 94).

In accordance with the findings  $H_3$ , which is "Attitude towards the psychology of religion course positively affects the level of meaning in life", was confirmed. The findings regarding the mediating role of the psychology of religion course in this study are in line with the findings of the study that the psychology of religion course is an important variable in making sense of life, as expressed by undergraduate students studying at the faculty of theology in the qualitative study (Yenen, 2016). Indeed, one of the fundamental endeavours of psychology of religion is to try to understand and illuminate religious life using scientific methods. This is because religion is one of the important elements that have influenced people's emotions, thoughts, imaginations and behaviours, shaping the formation of individuals' personalities and various behaviours in their daily lives. In this sense, psychology of religion, which has a very wide field of research, is one of the important disciplines that will contribute to the development of religious education, especially in practice. One of the fundamental purposes of theological education in today's societies is to equip students with the skills and knowledge necessary to lead meaningful lives. In this context, there is a need for scientific and systematic information about the spiritual worlds of children and young people. This is very important for teachers involved in religious education and teaching in schools. Indeed, the success of a RE teacher also depends on his or her close relationship with the data of psychology of religion on these issues (Yavuz, 1988, 254-256). This assertion finds support in numerous empirical studies that have identified a reciprocal relationship between an individual's attitude towards the course, the comprehension of its content, and the course's success (Güre, 1986; Oruç, 1993; Hotaman, 1995; Pehlivan, 1997; Kaya, 2001).

On the other hand the psychology of religion course facilitates comprehension of the development of religious attitudes and behaviours, their relationship with mental functions, and the reflection of religious feelings, thoughts and desires on religious attitudes and behaviours (Yavuz, 1982). Consequently, when evaluated in terms of content and achievement, the psychology of

religion course enables individuals to make accurate analyses by becoming aware of their religious feelings, thoughts and behaviours (Hökelekli, 2003, 94). At the same time, it can be posited that the psychology of religion course plays a pivotal role in the navigation of life's challenges by positively influencing an individual's religious inclinations, thereby imparting significance to the vicissitudes and setbacks encountered. A comprehensive review of the extant literature reveals that religion exerts a mitigating effect on the adverse psychological impact of crises on individuals. For instance, following the earthquake, it was found that individuals were able to mitigate the impact of the disaster on their psychological well-being by engaging in religious coping mechanisms (Okan-Şahin, 2024, 1609-1622; Kula, 2002, 234-255; Küçükcükan-Köse, 2000). Similarly, other studies have shown that religion provides a positive coping mechanism by influencing the interpretation of life challenges such as obstacles and disappointments (Pargament, 1997; Pargament, 2003; Ayten, 2010). In this context, the hypothesis that "Attitude towards the psychology of religion course mediates the relationship between religious attitude and the level of meaning in life" was confirmed. This finding is in support of hypothesis H4.

The present study found that the mean scores of religious attitudes, attitudes towards the psychology of religion course and meaning of life among the student population were high, and that there was a significant relationship existed between their attitude towards the psychology of religion course and the mean score of religious attitude. At the same time, a correlational relationship was identified between the attitude scores towards the psychology of religion course and the scale scores for the meaning of life. It can be said that the combination of the positive relationship between religious attitude and meaning in life and the findings that attitudes towards the psychology of religion course affect this relationship can make a modest contribution to the literature. Because the level of meaning in life can enable students to improve their perspectives on events, get rid of the negative effects of troubled processes with the least damage and increase their mental resilience.

In light of these findings, it is suggested that lecturers teaching the psychology of religion course should closely monitor students' attitudes towards the course, identify the deficiencies in the course, and diversify the course content and methods in order to positively influence students' attitudes. It is anticipated that the content of the psychology of religion course will contribute to this process, in conjunction with religious attitudes, in addressing the challenges students encounter in life, thereby fostering the development of individuals who demonstrate a high level of meaning in life. However, this study has some limitations that should be taken into account when interpreting the results. Primarily, the cross-sectional nature of the study precludes the determination of causal direction for any observed effects. In subsequent studies, the implementation of a longitudinal design that facilitates the observation of patterns of change over time and in causal directions is recommended.



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