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# Exploring the Link Between Competence, Relatedness, and Authenticity: An Existential Social Work Approach

## *Yetkinlik, İlişkisellik ve Otantiklik Arasındaki Bağlantıları Keşfetmek: Bir Varoluşçu Sosyal Hizmet Yaklaşımı*

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**ABSTRACT**

*This study examines the simultaneous relationships among competence, relatedness and authenticity among young adults in Turkey. Using Existential Social Work (ESW) as a theoretical framework, which emphasizes the importance of psychological need satisfaction in fostering authentic living, the study investigates how competence and relatedness simultaneously predict authenticity. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed using data collected from 310 participants aged 18–28. Results demonstrate that competence and relatedness simultaneously predict authenticity positively and significantly, collectively explaining 32% of the total variance. Both competence and relatedness indicate moderately positive associations with authenticity. Additionally, the study reveals a strong positive correlation between competence and relatedness. The current study contributes to the empirical literature on psychological need satisfaction and authenticity from an existential social work perspective. These findings have important implications for clinical social work practice, suggesting that interventions targeting the enhancement of competence and the development of meaningful relationships could be effective strategies for promoting authentic living. The study emphasizes the importance of integrated clinical social work approaches that address multiple dimensions of psychological need satisfaction in fostering authenticity and overall psychological well-being.*

**Keywords:** *Authenticity, competence, existential social work, relatedness, young adults*

**ÖZ**

*Bu çalışma, Türkiye'deki genç yetişkinler arasında yetkinlik ve ilişkisellik ile otantiklik arasındaki eş zamanlı ilişkileri incelemektedir. Psikolojik ihtiyaç doyumunun otantik yaşamı desteklemedeki önemini vurgulayan varoluşçu sosyal hizmet kuramsal çerçevesini kullanan çalışma, yetkinlik ve ilişkiselliğin otantikliği eş zamanlı olarak nasıl yordadığını araştırmaktadır. Araştırmada, 18-28 yaş arası 310 katılımcıdan toplanan veriler kullanılarak yapısal eşitlik modellemesi uygulanmıştır. Sonuçlar, yetkinlik ve ilişkiselliğin otantikliği eş zamanlı olarak pozitif ve anlamlı şekilde yordadığını ve toplam varyansın %32'sini açıkladığını göstermektedir. Yetkinlik ve ilişkisellik otantiklik ile orta düzeyde pozitif bir ilişki göstermektedir. Ayrıca çalışma, yetkinlik ve ilişkisellik arasında güçlü bir pozitif korelasyon olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Mevcut çalışma, varoluşçu sosyal hizmet perspektifinden psikolojik ihtiyaç doyumu ve otantikliğe ilişkin ampirik literatüre katkı sağlamaktadır. Bu bulgular, yetkinliğin artırılmasını ve anlamlı ilişkilerin geliştirilmesini hedefleyen müdahalelerin, otantik yaşamı teşvik etmede etkili stratejiler olabileceğini öne sürerek klinik sosyal hizmet uygulaması için önemli çıkarımlar sunmaktadır. Çalışma, otantikliği ve genel psikolojik iyi oluşu desteklemede psikolojik ihtiyaç*

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*doyumunun çoklu boyutlarını ele alan bütünleşik klinik sosyal hizmet yaklaşımların önemini vurgulamaktadır.*

**Anahtar kelimeler:** *Otantiklik, yetkinlik, varoluşçu sosyal hizmet, ilişkisellik, genç yetişkinler*

## INTRODUCTION

Authenticity, defined as the alignment between one's true self and outward behaviors, is a foundational concept across multiple psychological and philosophical theories. Existential psychology, for instance, emphasizes the importance of authentic living when confronting existential challenges, such as finding meaning in life and facing death (Heidegger, 1962; Sartre, 2003). Self-Determination Theory (SDT) also highlights the importance of authenticity, arguing that it is essential for psychological well-being and is driven by the satisfaction of basic psychological needs, including autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Similarly, Humanistic psychology, represented by theorists such as Carl Rogers (1961), considers authenticity as central to personal growth and self-actualization. These theoretical perspectives emphasize the value of authenticity in enhancing well-being and aligning individuals' actions with their true selves.

Due to its significant implications for individual well-being and social functioning, the concept of authenticity has gained considerable attention in social work. Within social work practice, authenticity is not only crucial for self-awareness and emotional regulation but also plays a vital role in building relationships and fostering personal growth (Kernis & Goldman, 2006). As the field focuses on promoting self-determination, personal empowerment, and social justice, authenticity becomes a foundational principle for both practitioners and clients. By fostering authenticity, social workers can help individuals develop a stronger sense of self and achieve well-being, which aligns with the goals of the profession (Thompson, 1992).

Various factors have been empirically linked to authenticity in psychological literature. Psychological well-being, self-esteem, and life satisfaction are positively associated with authenticity (Sheldon et al., 1997; Wood et al., 2008). Conversely, experiences of inauthenticity are connected to psychological distress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms (Lenton et al., 2013). Additionally, studies have shown that certain social and environmental factors, such as competence and relatedness, play essential roles in fostering or hindering authenticity. For instance, when individuals feel competent in their abilities and connected to others, they are more likely to express their true selves and act authentically (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

In this study, Existential Social Work (ESW) serves as the theoretical foundation, integrating principles from existential psychology and existentialism to address human concerns such as authenticity, freedom, and meaning-making (Krill, 1996). This approach emphasizes helping individuals confront existential anxieties, such as the search for meaning, autonomy, and authentic living, while navigating societal and relational dynamics. Authenticity is central to ESW because it encourages clients to live in accordance with their true selves, despite external pressures (Greene, 2017). By promoting self-awareness, personal responsibility, and meaning-making, social workers help clients engage with life authentically, a core tenet of ESW theory (van Deurzen, 2012). Within ESW, the psychological needs of competence and relatedness are theoretically linked to

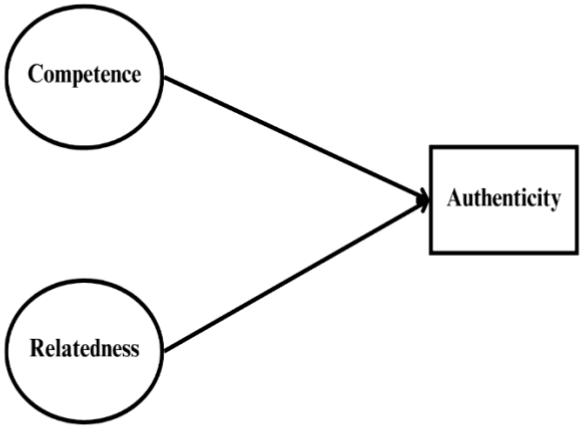
authenticity. Competence, defined as the ability to effectively interact with one's environment and achieve personal goals, allows individuals to feel capable and empowered, fostering a sense of autonomy and self-expression (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In social work, competence is often promoted through skills-building and empowerment strategies, enabling individuals to confidently pursue their authentic selves (Krill, 1996). Similarly, relatedness refers to the feeling of belonging and meaningful connections with others, which is crucial for authentic living. ESW highlights the importance of relationships that allow individuals to be themselves without the need to conform to external expectations (Thompson, 1992). When clients experience genuine relationships, they are more likely to act authentically, as their need for acceptance and connection is fulfilled without compromising their true identity (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Despite the theoretical establishment of these relationships, there is a significant gap in the empirical literature examining the simultaneous effects of competence and relatedness on authenticity. Although previous studies have independently linked these variables to authenticity, the concurrent examination of how competence and relatedness influence authenticity, particularly within the context of ESW, remains underexplored (Wood et al., 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2017). The scarcity of research in this area underscores the importance of the current study, which aims to fill this gap by investigating the simultaneous impact of competence and relatedness on authenticity among young adults. In addition to addressing the research gap, this study makes an original contribution by integrating the ESW approach with the empirical investigation of competence and relatedness as predictors of authenticity. By grounding the research in ESW, this study emphasizes the practical significance of promoting authenticity in social work interventions, particularly through enhancing individuals' sense of competence and fostering supportive, meaningful relationships (Krill, 1996). The study's findings will provide actionable insights for social workers, who can apply these concepts to help clients develop a deeper sense of self-awareness and authenticity, thereby improving their psychological well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2017). The unique cultural context of young adults in Turkey also adds to the originality of this research. Understanding how authenticity is shaped by competence and relatedness in this non-Western context offers new perspectives for social work interventions that respect cultural diversity and the specific needs of clients from different backgrounds (Hodgins & Knee, 2002). As authenticity is a universally important yet culturally nuanced concept, this study contributes to the global discourse on social work practices by highlighting the intersection of psychological and cultural factors in promoting well-being (van Deurzen, 2012).

The primary objective of this study is to examine the effects of competence and relatedness on authenticity among young adults in Turkey, using the ESW approach as the theoretical framework. By focusing on competence and relatedness, two essential psychological needs, this study aims to uncover how these factors contribute to individuals' ability to live authentically (Figure 1). This investigation is particularly relevant in the context of social work, where fostering authenticity can help clients achieve greater self-awareness, personal growth, and well-being (Greene, 2017).

Moreover, the study addresses the role of social work practitioners in facilitating these processes, emphasizing the importance of promoting supportive relationships and empowering clients to develop competence in their everyday lives (Krill, 1996).

**Figure 1. Theoretical Model of Research**




This research provides several unique contributions to both social work practice and the broader field of social work science. First, it advances empirical understanding by addressing the underexplored simultaneous effects of competence and relatedness on authenticity, which have been widely discussed theoretically but rarely studied together (Wood et al., 2008). Second, the findings of this study have practical implications for social work interventions, particularly in guiding practitioners to focus on strategies that enhance clients' competence and foster meaningful, supportive relationships. By helping clients develop these essential psychological resources, social workers can support their journey toward living more authentically, which is associated with improved mental health and well-being (Sheldon et al., 1997). Furthermore, the study's focus on young adults in Turkey adds a cultural dimension to the growing body of research on authenticity. Cultural factors can shape how individuals experience authenticity, competence, and relatedness, making this study a valuable contribution to understanding these concepts in non-Western contexts (Hodgins & Knee, 2002). As such, the research offers important insights for social work professionals who work with diverse populations, reinforcing the importance of cultural competence and sensitivity when applying ESW principles in practice.

## 2. THEORETİCAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESİS DEVELOPMENT

### 2.1. Authenticity

Authenticity entails harmonizing internal experiences, values, and behaviors, prioritizing being genuine to oneself over external influences or societal conventions. Existentialist thinkers such as Kierkegaard (1992), Heidegger (1962), and Sartre (2003) framed authenticity as a conscious, responsible choice to live in accordance with one's own values despite external pressures. In psychology, Rogers (1961) emphasized congruence between self-image and lived experience as essential for becoming a "fully functioning person," while Maslow (1968) identified authenticity as a characteristic of self-actualizing individuals. Within SDT, Deci and Ryan (2000) conceptualized authenticity as rooted in the satisfaction of basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness). Building on these foundations, contemporary research has elaborated authenticity into three psychological components: self-alienation, authentic living, and acceptance of external influence (Wood et al., 2008). Across these traditions, authenticity is consistently linked to psychological health, resilience, and personal growth.

Authenticity is a major construct in psychology that ties into well-being, identity development, and general mental health, but at the same time authenticity sheds light on the struggle between individual freedom and the boundaries of society (Cooper, 2003). It is a very basic component of all sorts of theories, such as SDT, which posits that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are all vital to psychological health (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Authenticity here relates closely to autonomy, fostering intrinsic motivation and alignment between personal values and actions (Ryan et al., 2005). Authenticity is also a key concept in Humanistic Psychology, with Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow. Rogers (1961) viewed authenticity as essential for becoming a "fully functioning person, achieved through congruence between self-image and experiences, supported by unconditional positive regard.

According to Maslow (1968), one of the characteristics of self-actualizing individuals is their authenticity, that is, their ability to be who they really are without worrying about what others may think of them. Authenticity is the term used in Existential Psychotherapy, which is based on existential philosophy, that deals with the concepts of freedom, meaninglessness, and isolation (Yalom, 1980). This approach encourages the individual to "be true to thyself" and reject socially constructed ideologies that may cause one to live an inauthentic life (Schneider & Krug, 2017). Positive Psychology also incorporates authenticity and connects it to psychological well-being, positive affect, and resilience (Wood et al., 2008). Here, authenticity enables purpose-driven, intentional living.

Theories and therapy approaches, most significantly in existential and humanistic psychology, emphasize the importance of authenticity in the development of health. Authenticity in clinical practice fosters self-society relations and increases therapeutic successes, as truthfulness correlates with higher levels of psychological well-being and overall life satisfaction (Heppner et al.,

2008). Existential therapy focuses on the individual's confrontation with ambiguity and taking personal responsibility for the choices one makes in life in order to be true to oneself (Sartre, 2003; Van Deurzen, 2012). Rogers (1961) also believed in the genuine in humanistic therapy, congruence is a healthy psychological state of being. This client-focused approach, based on unconditional positive regard, allows people to truly express what and who they are.

Over the past few years, numerous research studies have supported the idea that authenticity is closely related to happiness. Authentic people are more likely to report greater life satisfaction, high self-esteem, emotional stability, and lower neuroticism and depression (Wood et al., 2008). According to positive psychology, authenticity is associated with "flourishing," or optimal psychological functioning (Huta & Ryan, 2010), and enhanced purpose and fulfillment (Kifer et al., 2013). Authenticity is the basis for more meaningful, more satisfying relationships; people who are genuine with themselves are more likely to respect and trust others (Brunell et al., 2010; Yalom, 1980). Moreover, authenticity is related to self-concept clarity, or a well-defined self. Those high in authenticity are more confident and secure in their decisions in the big issues of life (Campbell et al., 1996). This self-comprehension leads to personal development, the ability to live a life in accordance with one's beliefs, ideals, and dreams. Authenticity acts as a buffer against the negative effects of social comparison and external pressures (Sedikides et al., 2017). Authentic individuals don't feel as much pressure to adhere to the expectations of society and instead pursue those goals that are consistent with their own values and ultimately well-being and hardiness. This defensive aspect underscores the role of authenticity in emotional well-being, interpersonal power, and resilience to forces outside of self (Yalom, 1980).

Authenticity also plays a key role in the ESW approach, which is based on existential philosophy that emphasizes freedom, responsibility, and the search for meaning. ESW defines authenticity as staying true to oneself and personal values, even amid life's uncertainties (Krill, 1996). Social workers using this approach view clients as autonomous individuals, capable of making meaningful choices despite external constraints. Here authenticity is a release, allowing the clients to live according to their own values not necessarily those of society or their family (Van Deurzen, 2012). ESW is an approach that deals with existential anxieties (like isolation, freedom, and meaninglessness) and encourages the client to face these issues in a genuine way. This encourages "the freedom to choose and the responsibility that goes with that freedom" (Van Deurzen, 2012). For clients in distress, ESW facilitates exploration of genuine feelings and existential dilemmas, fostering decisions true to one's core self (Krill, 1996). Existential social workers help clients reestablish a connection with their true selves and thereby combat alienation and disconnection. This introspective process allows clients to better see the meaning of their lives and to feel more in control of their own lives which are so often taken away by outside forces or social roles or inner struggles (Krill, 1996).

In ESW, authenticity is not just a personal issue, it is also relational in nature. Social workers in this approach argue that authentic relationships, those based on mutual respect, open communication, and sincere concern, are essential to human experience and the therapeutic process (Van Deurzen, 2012). In these relationships, social workers allow clients the opportunity to try on and show their "real selves", which is essential to any change that is to be significant. In social work, promoting authenticity is vital, especially in existential and humanistic approaches. Clients allowed to be their authentic selves can better understand their motivations and respond proactively to challenges, leading to more positive and lasting results (Graybeal, 2001). Authenticity also strengthens clients through self-ownership and self-resilience and self-agency. When clients feel free to be themselves, they can discover their needs, make choices, and assume control of their lives (Krill, 1996; Thompson, 1992). Moreover, a true therapeutic relationship, based on empathy and non-judgment provides a secure and nurturing holding space where clients know that they are heard, they are cared about, and they are understood (Van Deurzen, 2012). This base is important because clients are more likely to disclose their problems and participate in therapy if they feel this connection (Graybeal, 2001).

### 2.2. Competence and Authenticity

Competence is one of the three basic psychological needs (the other two being autonomy and relatedness) that are necessary for optimal human function. This is basically defined as a person's ability to interact with their surrounding world and manage to overcome challenges and accomplish desired goals with a sense of personal efficacy (Ryan & Deci, 2000). According to SDT competence is a basic need, because a feeling of effectiveness and mastery provides the motive force for goal directed behavior and the further acquisition of skills (Ryan & Deci, 2017). The satisfaction of this need leads to feelings of achievement, which in turn encourages more participation in skill challenging activities (White, 1959).

According to SDT, the development of competence is a necessity for the internalization of regulation and active exploration of the environment (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory also backs this up, stating that self-efficacy, or belief in one’s ability, increases motivation and perseverance, particularly when faced with difficult tasks (Bandura, 1977). Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory further supports the concept of competence as a relational construct in that he stated learning and competence only occur through interactions with more skilled individuals in the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). Lastly, cognitive-behavioral theorists propose that competence is not something one is born with but is something that is acquired through learned skills and cognitive strategies that lead to emotional control and a decrease in psychological discomfort (Beck, 1979). In this context competence becomes a steppingstone for better mental health and personal development.

Competence is a key construct in social work theory because it is empowering the clients with the skills and abilities, they need to maneuver their social and psychological environments, to overcome

the various barriers that prevent them from successful functioning (Krill, 1996). According to Thompson (1992), in ESW competence contributes to a sense of meaning and resilience for the client. There are numerous studies that show competence is related to many positive variables including life satisfaction, vitality, and overall well-being (Tay & Diener, 2011) and the frustration of competence is related to helplessness, anxiety, and depression (Chandler & Chapman, 1991). Competence would also foster motivation and involvement; in SDT, competence satisfaction leads to greater intrinsic motivation and task involvement (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Studies show that when one becomes competent, they tend to be more engaged and perform better in a scholastic setting (Jang et al., 2010). Similarly, self-efficacy, or the belief in one's own abilities, leads to perseverance and achievement, particularly when it comes to overcoming hardships (Bandura, 1997; Bandura & Locke, 2003). Moreover, competence is closely related to autonomy and relatedness, the other two basic needs of SDT, which all together lead to optimal functioning and well-being (Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013).

The new field of existential psychology has started to explore the connection between competence and authenticity. Studies have demonstrated that individuals who feel empowered are also more likely to act in line with their values, another marker of authenticity (Sheldon et al., 2004). For instance, Kernis and Goldman (2006) have demonstrated that high levels of competence satisfaction are associated with authenticity, in part because proficient individuals are more likely to feel at ease being themselves. Second, self-consciousness is often learned through experiences of competence. When individuals feel a sense of agency, they are more apt to reflect on what they really desire and to act in ways that align a life with the self (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Competence even has been listed as a mediator between authenticity and psychological well-being, such that competence leads to authenticity, which leads to well-being (Heppner et al., 2008). However, while these studies are insightful, the research linking competence and authenticity remains limited. More empirical work is needed to understand how this relationship might change with cultural and situational differences (Lenton et al., 2016).

ESW theory emphasizes helping individuals find meaning, purpose, and authenticity while grappling with existential uncertainties (Frankl, 1963). Competence, a fundamental element enabling individuals to function and perform essential tasks, relates closely to self-actualization, which Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943) defines as the realization of one's full potential and unique purpose. Individuals with high self-efficacy more readily question life's meaning and make morally aligned decisions, while ESW practice focuses on building client competence through empowerment interventions. This empowerment approach enables clients to express their authentic selves and aligns with existential principles of individual responsibility and choice (Yalom, 1980).

ESW recognizes existential anxiety stemming from awareness of personal freedom and life's uncertainties. Competency serves as a buffer against existential dread, enabling more effective self-

actualization and world interaction. Enhanced competency reduces anxiety and promotes authenticity, leading to overall well-being and fulfillment (Wong, 1998). This understanding of competency and empowerment is crucial for social work interventions, as it enables clients to make autonomous decisions reflecting their true selves. When clients feel competent, they more readily express their needs, values, and pursue their goals. Social workers facilitate this empowerment by helping clients overcome obstacles and regain life control (Saleebey, 2002), ultimately supporting their journey toward authentic self-expression through interventions that enhance their abilities and self-efficacy. The combination of competence and authenticity fosters resilience, enabling clients to manage life's stressors effectively. This sense of control is particularly crucial in social work with high-risk, victimized populations (Thompson, 1992). Through therapeutic relationships, social workers provide clients opportunities to develop mastery, leading to renewed competency and a more authentic approach to life's challenges.

Research demonstrates that individuals who experience both competence and authenticity report higher life satisfaction and lower rates of anxiety and depression (Sheldon et al., 2004; Wood et al., 2008). A strong correlation exists between competence and one's ability to find meaning and purpose (Frankl, 1963). Social workers' skill development interventions enable clients to identify their strengths, interests, and values, promoting more authentic and meaningful lives. The therapeutic relationship itself is fundamental to developing both competence and genuineness, with Rogers (1961) emphasizing that a safe, nonjudgmental atmosphere allows clients to explore their identity, emotions, and capabilities. Building upon these empirical findings and theoretical arguments, we advance the following hypothesis: *Competence positively predicts authenticity (H1).*

### 2.3. Relatedness and Authenticity

Relatedness, a basic psychological need, encompasses the human desire for meaningful connections and social belonging. Within SDT, it joins autonomy and competence as essential needs for optimal psychological functioning (Deci & Ryan, 2000). This concept also reflects existential perspectives on human connection as a counter to isolation (Vansteenkiste et al., 2020). Martin Buber's I-Thou concept (1923/1970) emphasizes authentic interpersonal connections beyond objectification, while Sartre's "being-for-others" explores the tension between individual freedom and connection needs (Sartre, 2003).

The concept of relatedness intersects with multiple psychological frameworks. In SDT, it functions as a core psychological need essential for motivation and mental health (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Attachment Theory, developed by Bowlby (1969), emphasizes the importance of early secure emotional bonds in facilitating lifelong relationship capabilities (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) addresses relatedness through group membership and its influence on self-concept and behavior (Hogg, 2006). Additionally, Rogers' person-centered therapy highlights the therapeutic relationship's role in fostering personal growth through empathy and unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 1961). In SDT, relatedness is fundamental to intrinsic

motivation, enhancing engagement and persistence crucial for mental well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Clinically, particularly in existential therapies, fostering relatedness addresses isolation as a core human challenge. Attachment theory applications assist clinicians recognize and treat marital challenges caused by insecure attachment patterns (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Existential psychotherapy considers relatedness to true existence, assisting clients in exploring relationships with themselves and others (Yalom, 1980).

Research consistently shows that relatedness is associated with well-being, life satisfaction, and positive affect, whereas its absence correlates with psychiatric distress (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Vansteenkiste et al., 2020). According to research, relatedness has a major impact on a variety of domains. In education, it promotes intrinsic motivation and academic engagement (Furrer et al., 2014); in the workplace, it improves job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Gagné & Deci, 2005). Social Identity Theory links relatedness to positive social identity development and group cohesion (Hogg, 2006). Additionally, research indicates that high relatedness correlates with greater relationship satisfaction and emotional intimacy in interpersonal bonds (La Guardia et al., 2000). Research indicates that relatedness significantly predicts authentic living within SDT and existential psychology frameworks. Supportive relationships create secure environments for genuine self-expression without judgment (La Guardia et al., 2000), with higher relatedness correlating to increased authenticity in relationships (Ryan et al., 2005). In therapeutic settings, strong therapeutic alliances facilitate deeper self-exploration and authentic expression (Yalom, 1980). However, excessive dependence on external validation can impede authenticity and lead to self-alienation (Lynch et al., 2009).

ESW theory frames relatedness as fundamental to human existence and authentic living (Coady & Lehmann, 2016). This approach addresses existential concerns like isolation and meaning-making, recognizing that disconnection can hinder authentic living (Yalom, 1980). Through fostering meaningful relationships, individuals become better equipped to explore their true selves and make authentic life choices. ESW emphasizes the delicate balance between relatedness and autonomy, recognizing that while relationships provide emotional support for authenticity, individuals must maintain their autonomous self-expression (Coady & Lehmann, 2016). In clinical practice, existential social workers utilize therapeutic relationships to model authentic connections, creating spaces of unconditional acceptance that help clients overcome isolation and develop genuine relationships with themselves and others (Cooper, 2003).

Social work interventions, particularly those grounded in existential and humanistic approaches, address the interconnection between relatedness and authenticity to empower clients toward fulfilling lives (Coady & Lehmann, 2016). By helping clients reconnect with supportive relationships and communities, social workers address social isolation's negative effects on mental health while facilitating authentic self-expression (La Guardia et al., 2000). ESW practitioners guide clients in

navigating the tension between relatedness and autonomy through reflective evaluation of relationships and boundary-setting (Cooper, 2003). This approach extends to group and community-based interventions, where authentic connections between participants foster belonging and mutual understanding. Such group settings provide opportunities for genuine self-expression and validation, strengthening both relatedness and authenticity (Yalom, 1980). Social workers in trauma recovery, substance abuse treatment, and mental health services frequently encounter clients with disrupted relatedness. Building authentic relationships becomes essential for recovery and psychological resilience in these therapeutic contexts (Ryan & Deci, 2017). From a social justice perspective, nurturing relatedness and authenticity empowers marginalized communities, as social workers help individuals in oppressed groups develop authentic connections within their communities and broader social movements. These connections foster collective identity and empowerment, enabling authentic self-expression despite systemic oppression (Adams et al., 2013). Guided by these empirical findings and theoretical considerations, we hypothesize that *relatedness positively predicts authenticity (H2).*

## 3. METHOD

### 3.1. Participants and procedure

The data collection process for the research took place in the last two weeks of August 2024, with the approval of the Bartin University Committee for Ethics in Social and Human Sciences (Date: 30.05.2024 / Protocol Number: 2024-SBB-0343). To identify participants for the research, we employed a purposeful sampling method known as "criterion sampling." Accordingly, inclusion criteria stipulated that those volunteers must be Turkish citizens, aged between 18 and 28, residing in Turkey. We shared the survey link, created through the Microsoft Office Form platform, with 320 individuals who met these criteria. In total, 310 volunteers completed the respective surveys. As participation in the research was entirely voluntary, no compensation was provided to participants. Feedback received from volunteers indicated the absence of any issues during the survey application process. Among the participants, 32.3% were male, 67.7% were female, and the average age was 20 (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Demographic information**

| Variables | Frequency (Percent) | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Gender** | 310 (100) | | .46 |
| *Female* | 210 (67.7) | | |
| *Male* | 100 (32.3) | | |
| **Age** | 310 (100) | 20.00 | 1.65 |
| **Marital Status** | 310 (100) | | .12 |
| *Single* | 305 (98.4) | | |
| *Married* | 5 (1.6) | | |
| **Educational Status** | 310 (100) | | .52 |
| *Illiterate* | 3 (1) | | |
| *Primary school graduate* | 10 (3.2) | | |
| *High school graduate* | 225 (72.6) | | |
| *Bachelor's degree* | 71 (22.9) | | |
| *Master's degree and PhD* | 1 (.3) | | |
| **Monthly İncome** | 310 (100) | 9601.13 | 10444.28 |

The study adhered to APA ethical guidelines during the data collection process. Informed consent, both written and verbal, was obtained from all participants before their involvement in the study. Participants were made aware of the confidentiality of their data, their right to withdraw from the research at any point, and the limited circumstances under which their information might be shared with third parties. The ethical procedures followed in this research are consistent with the principles set forth in the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later revisions.

### 3.2. Materials

#### 3.2.1. Demographic characteristics

The researcher created a form to collect demographic information, such as age, gender, and marital status, from participants.

### 3.2.2. Competence and Relatedness

Competence and relatedness are measured through the Basic Psychological Needs Scale (BPNS) (Gagné, 2003). The Turkish adaptation of the BPNS comprises 25 items, as established by Yıldırım (2024). One example item is: "Recently, I have been able to acquire interesting new skills." Respondents rate the items on a 7-point scale, ranging from 1 (absolutely not true) to 7 (completely true). The scale is organized into three sub-dimensions: competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Each sub-dimension captures specific aspects of basic psychological needs. The current research utilizes the competence subfactor to evaluate satisfaction of the need for competence and the relatedness subfactor to assess the satisfaction of the need for relatedness. Concerning validity and reliability, the Turkish version of the scale demonstrates satisfactory results (Yıldırım, 2024). In the present study, the internal consistency reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) was .77 for all items of the competence and relatedness subscales, .72 for the relatedness subscale and .64 for the competence subscale, indicating acceptable internal consistency for relatedness and marginal consistency for competence. This may reflect cultural nuances in how competence is experienced and expressed among Turkish young adults, or the relatively brief nature of the subscale. However, the overall measurement model demonstrated adequate fit, and the structural relationships remained significant, suggesting that the scale performed sufficiently for the purposes of hypothesis testing.

### 3.2.3. Authenticity

The Authenticity Scale (Wood et al., 2008) was adapted for use in Turkish populations by İlhan and Özdemir (2013). This Turkish adaptation comprises 12 items assessing three dimensions of authenticity: authentic living, self-alienation, and acceptance of external influence. A representative item from the scale is "I think it is better to be yourself than to be popular." Responses are recorded on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (does not describe me at all) to 7 (describes me very well). The authenticity score is computed by subtracting the sum of the self-alienation and acceptance of external influence subfactor scores from the authentic living subfactor score. The Turkish version demonstrates sound psychometric properties, including good reliability and satisfactory construct validity (İlhan & Özdemir, 2013). In the current investigation, the internal consistency reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) of the whole scale is .71.

## 4. DATA ANALYSİS

The study employed SPSS software (version 22.0) for computing descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and correlations among the variables of interest. Further analyses, encompassing multiple regression relationships, confirmatory factor analyses (CFA), and mediation tests, were conducted using AMOS software (version 20.0). The research methodology adhered to the multivariate structural equation modeling (SEM) framework, comprising both measurement and structural model evaluations. In the initial phase, the measurement model underwent assessment for reliability and validity, yielding satisfactory outcomes. The subsequent phase involved testing the

structural model's fit with the data, applying criteria proposed by Kline (2011). Results indicated that the hypothesized construct model demonstrated high congruence with the empirical data.

## 5. RESULT

### 5.1. Descriptive Statistics and Zero-Order Correlations

Table 2 presents the study variables' means, standard deviations, and correlations. The correlation analysis indicated that authenticity has a strong positive association with competence and a moderate positive association with relatedness. Competence has a moderate positive association with relatedness (see Table 2). Statistical indicators of multicollinearity reveal that all correlations are below .70 and VIF values are all below 2.00 (1.26-1.26). These results indicate that there is no multicollinearity problem in the study.

**Table 2. Mean, standard deviations (SD), and intercorrelations among study measures.**

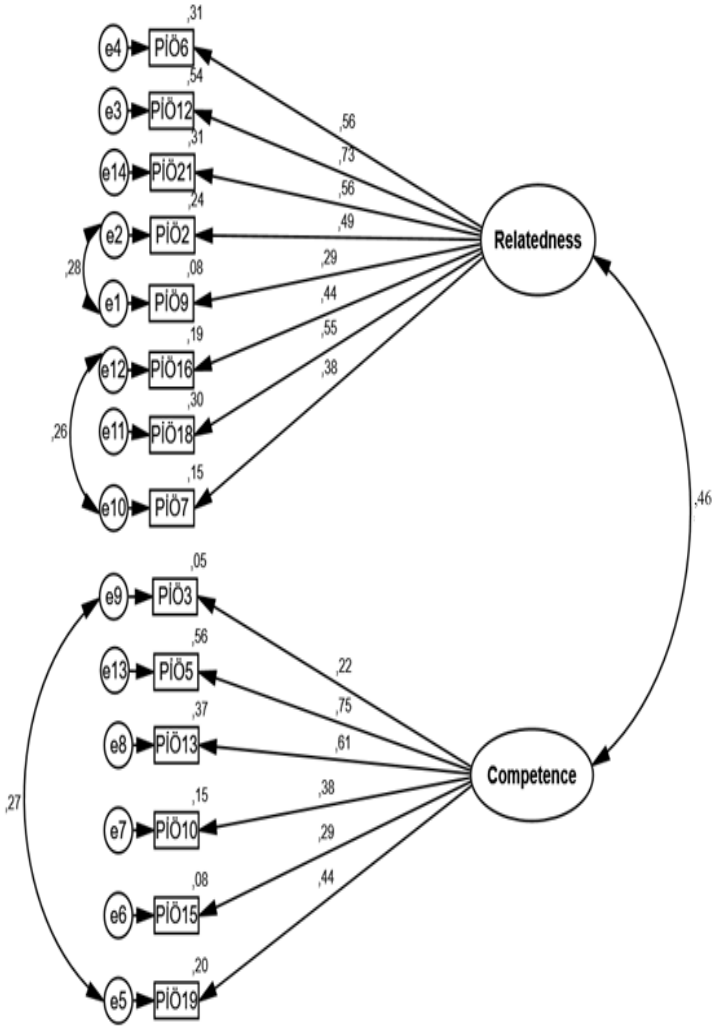
| | M | SD | 1 | 2 | Skewness (SE) | Kurtosis (SE) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1. Competence** | 3.39 | .60 | | | -.38 (.13) | .31 (.27) |
| **2. Relatedness** | 3.77 | .57 | .45** | | -.41 (.13) | .23 (.27) |
| **3. Authenticity** | -1.87 | 3.13 | .44** | .49** | .05 (.13) | -.61 (.27) |

**Note: ****Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

### 5.2. Analysis of The Measurement Model

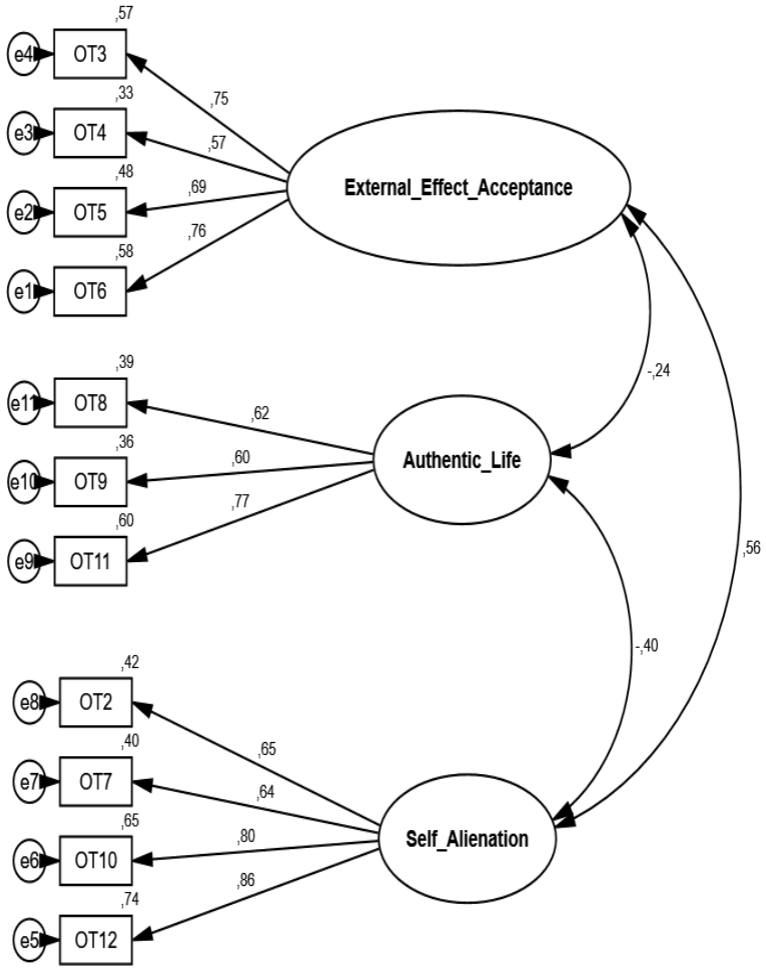
The current study conducted CFA to evaluate the fit of the scales utilized in the study with the data. The CFA results for the competence and relatedness indicated a satisfactory fit: $\chi 2 = 209.32$; df = 73; $\chi 2/df = 2.86$; RMSEA = .07; SRMR = .06; CFI = .84; GFI = .91. All variables adequately represented their respective latent factors (see Figure 2). While the CFI value is slightly below the conventional threshold of .90, the RMSEA, SRMR, and $\chi^2/df$ indices fall within acceptable ranges, collectively supporting a reasonable model fit (Kline, 2011). This pattern of fit indices is not uncommon in applied social science research, particularly with moderate sample sizes and multi-dimensional constructs (Kline, 2011). Given the theoretical grounding of the constructs and the satisfactory performance of other fit indices, the model was retained for subsequent analyses.

**Figure 2. CFA Results on Competence and Relatedness**




Regarding the authenticity (external effect accept, self-alienation, and authentic life), the CFA indicated an acceptable level of fit with the data: $\chi 2 = 72.49$; df = 41; $\chi 2/df = 1.76$; RMSEA = .05; SRMR = .04; CFI = .97; GFI = .96. All variables adequately represented their respective latent factors (see Figure 3).

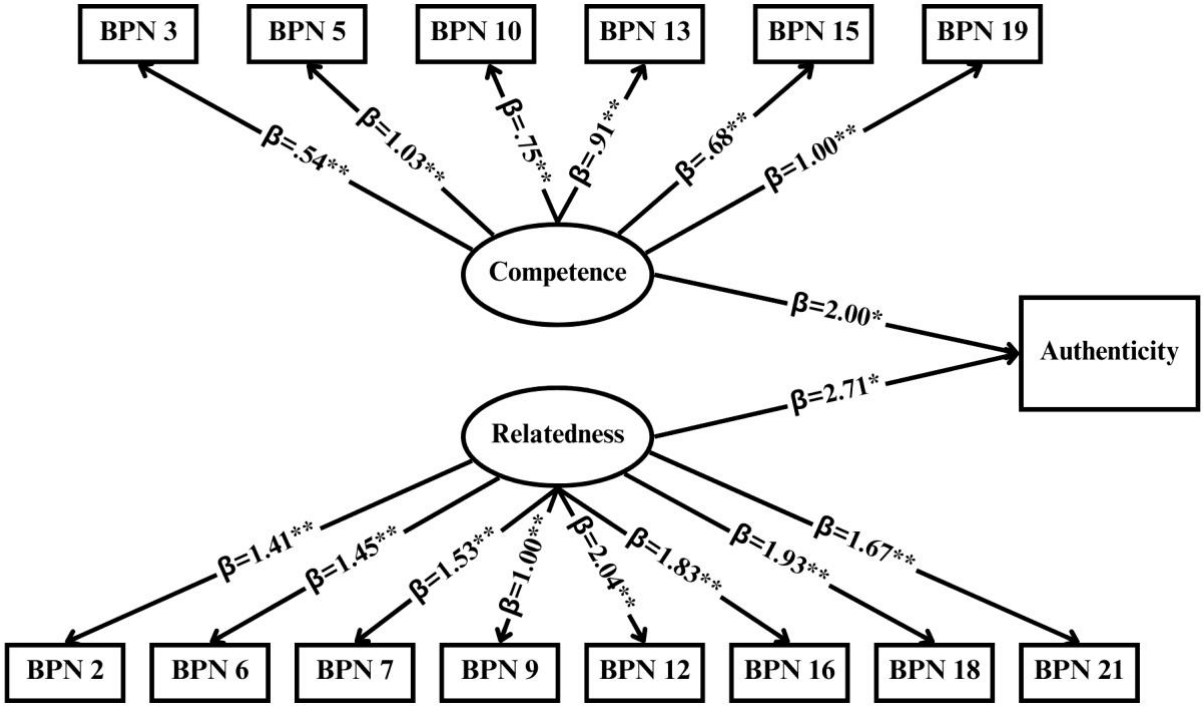
**Figure 3. CFA Results on Authenticity Components**




### 5.3. Relationships Between Competence, Relatedness, and Authenticity

Figure 4 displays the results of the structural model test. The analysis results indicate that the proposed structural model is consistent with the data obtained from the research.: $\chi 2 = 253.77$; df = 85; $\chi 2/df = 2.98$; RMSEA = .08; SRMR = .07; GFI = .90. The findings indicate that competence moderately, positively, and significantly predicts authenticity (2.00.; $p<.05$). This supports H1. The relatedness moderately, positively, and significantly predicts authenticity (2.71; $p<.05$). This supports H2. The squared coefficient of multiple correlation results indicates that 32% of authenticity is explained through competence and relatedness.

**Figure 4. Structural Model Results**




**Note:** All paths depict the unstandardized coefficient's effects. **p<.001. *p<.05

## DISCUSSION

The primary objective of this study was to examine the relationships between competence, relatedness, and authenticity among Turkish citizens aged 18-28. Specifically, this research investigated the direct effects of competence and relatedness on authenticity, grounded in the framework of ESW theory.

The structural equation modeling (SEM) results reveal that competence significantly and moderately predicts authenticity (H1). This finding implies that individuals who perceive themselves as capable and competent are more likely to exhibit authentic behaviors. Authenticity is fundamentally about being true to oneself, and the experience of competence strengthens one's belief in their ability to act in accordance with their internal values and beliefs, leading to higher levels of authentic self-expression (Kernis & Goldman, 2006). There are several empirical studies that confirm this positive correlation between competence and authenticity. For instance, Vansteenkiste and Ryan (2013) found competence to be one of the key psychological needs required for authenticity. When people are competent, they're more likely to behave in ways that are true to them and therefore feel more genuine. Similarly, studies have shown that when they feel competent, people experience higher levels of self-esteem, self-acceptance and congruence between their behavior and their internal values - qualities that are key to authenticity (Ryan & Deci, 2017). The sensation of efficacy is what makes it possible for people to confront life's difficult questions without losing their integrity, because it provides the basis for hope that they can stay true to their own values despite the pressures to

conform that they experience from the world around them. Another study by Heppner et al. (2008) discussed the relationship between competence and authenticity, arguing that the experience of competence not only creates subjective well-being, but also supports genuine self-expression in the social sphere. This finding aligns with the current study's results, further supporting the notion that competence is crucial for the development and maintenance of authenticity.

In the ESW framework, the link between competence and authenticity is based on the premise that people cannot be authentic if they don't feel in control of their situation. ESW focuses on personal agency and responsibility, both of which are associated with the feeling of competence (Frankl, 1963). The ability to confront life's dilemmas and act in substantive ways makes one more authentic because it validates a person's freedom to be true to oneself in what one does and chooses to do. In an existential sense, competence has to do with the ability to orient oneself in the uncertainties of life while preserving integrity and authenticity. It also speaks to the existentialists' focus on empowerment, on agency in the pursuit of a meaningful life. In this manner, the competent are more likely to behave authentically, in a way that is consistent with their own values, than they are likely to behave in ways that are pleasing to others (Krill, 1996). This is consistent with the core values of ESW, which tries to help individuals to be in control of their lives and be themselves.

The finding that competence is a predictor of authenticity raises significant implications for social work practice. Social work should concern itself with client empowerment through the enhancement of the individual's sense of agency to life's challenges. Empowerment-oriented interventions, such as skill-building, problem-solving, and self-efficacy training, can leave clients feeling more competent, and that, in turn, could lead to increased authenticity (Payne, 2014). Clients need authenticity for their own well-being because it enables them to live a life more aligned with their values, beliefs and desires, and in doing so, it reduces the dissonance between the pressures of the world and the self. In practice, this means that social workers must build circumstances that foster client’s agency and competence, bringing them to recognize and to exercise their capacities. The more competent clients become, they may feel more empowered to be themselves in their personal and professional lives, leading to improved mental health and relationship success (Greene, 2017). Also, competence development can enhance client resilience, so that after the experience of therapy they feel more confident about dealing with future challenges while staying true to themselves.

The structural equation modelling analysis reveals that relatedness predicts authenticity positively and significantly as well (H2). This finding implies that the quality of interpersonal connections plays a crucial role in fostering authentic self-expression. When people feel that they belong to others, they tend to be more open to sharing their true selves, because they know that they are accepted as they are, and this creates a safe space for authenticity (Heppner et al., 2008). Authenticity, in this sense, is both a private and an interpersonal experience. And this positive link between relatedness and authenticity suggests that, to the extent that people have close, supportive relationships, they will

feel more comfortable being themselves. The reason is that such relationships provide affirmation and belonging, which mitigates the fear of negative evaluation that would otherwise discourage authentic behavior (Kernis & Goldman, 2006). In this sense, relatedness functions as a social foundation for authenticity, providing the relational support individuals require to be true to themselves. There is a growing body of research that supports the positive association between relatedness and authenticity. For instance, a recent study by Li and Hu (2023) showed that people who enjoy greater amounts of social support and relatedness are more likely to be authentic. The study has shown that a tight, intimate relationship enables individuals to express their true selves, without the risk that they will incur the negative consequences of doing so (e.g., ostracism, disapproval). This aligns with the current study's finding that relatedness enhances authenticity by providing the emotional and social safety needed for authentic self-expression. Similarly, Reis et al. (2018) have shown that connected individuals are more likely to act in ways that are true to themselves. To the researchers, the experience of relatedness is an elementary psychological need whose satisfaction promotes authenticity. The reason is that interpersonal relationships provide people with the feeling of belonging and security that they need to live by their own values and beliefs without fear of reprisal or social sanction. The current study's findings reinforce this perspective, showing that relatedness is a key predictor of authenticity.

In ESW, the link between relatedness and authenticity is a reflection of the realization that humans are fundamentally relational beings. And in fact, thinkers in the existential tradition (such as Martin Buber, 1970) have long emphasized the contribution of authentic relationships to the growth of personal wholeness. According to Buber's I-Thou relations, authenticity is possible only through intense, genuine experience with other human beings. This view is also reflected in ESW, which holds that authentic self-expression is deeply tied to the quality of one's interpersonal relationships (Thompson, 1992). In ESW practice, relatedness is seen as a vital component of human experience, enabling individuals to develop their authentic selves through meaningful connections with others. This aligns with the idea that individuals require supportive relationships to feel secure enough to express their true selves. By fostering genuine, empathetic connections, existential social workers can create environments where clients feel safe to explore and express their authentic selves (Krill, 1996). Thus, the positive relationship between relatedness and authenticity identified in this study resonates with existential social work's focus on the relational dimension of human existence.

The confirmation of H2 has practical implications for social work practice, particularly in the context of relational interventions. Social workers must understand what a difference relatedness makes in mental health and well-being. Authentic living is a correlation of psychological health, and by fostering relatedness, social workers can help clients reduce the experience of alienation and loneliness that is often a side effect of inauthenticity. This approach is particularly effective in cases where clients are socially excluded or marginalized, as the creation of social support networks can reduce isolation and increase the likelihood of clients feeling empowered to live as their true selves.

Furthermore, it is worth considering these findings within the specific socio-cultural context of Turkey, as highlighted in the introduction. While this was not a comparative cross-cultural study, the Turkish context presents a unique interplay of collectivistic and individualistic values that may amplify the importance of both relatedness and competence in fostering authenticity. On one hand, the culture's emphasis on relational harmony and strong familial ties may make relatedness a crucial prerequisite for authentic living. For young adults navigating the expression of their true selves, feeling securely connected and accepted by others can provide the safe foundation necessary for self-exploration.

In parallel, the experience of competence takes on a particular salience in a society with a highly competitive educational system and significant economic pressures on its youth. For many young adults in Turkey, achieving key milestones—such as passing university entrance exams or securing stable employment—is a primary marker of capability and success. In this high-stakes environment, feeling competent can provide individuals with the confidence and sense of agency needed to resist external pressures and align their life choices with their internal values. Therefore, both the secure social connections (relatedness) and the empowered sense of personal effectiveness (competence) appear to be profoundly important supports for young adults striving for authenticity amidst complex societal expectations. Future research could build upon these findings by employing a cross-cultural comparative design to investigate these dynamics more directly.

A potential limitation of the present study is the unequal distribution of gender within the sample, with a higher proportion of female participants. To investigate whether this imbalance influenced the findings, a supplementary analysis was conducted. We re-tested the proposed structural equation model, including gender as a covariate with a direct path to authenticity. The results of this analysis indicated that gender was not a significant predictor of authenticity ($\beta = .27$, $p > .05$). Crucially, the path coefficients from both competence ($\beta = 1.99$, $p < .05$) and relatedness ($\beta = 2.72$, $p < .05$) to authenticity remained significant and their values were highly consistent with the original model. This suggests that the observed relationships between psychological need satisfaction and authenticity are robust and not a confounding effect of the sample's gender composition. Another important potential limitation of the research is the marginal internal consistency value of the competence subscale ($\alpha = .64$). This may indicate that some items in the scale did not perform optimally in our specific sample. However, it is crucial to interpret this limitation within the context of our analytical approach. Our primary analyses relied on Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), which models latent variables and explicitly accounts for measurement error for each item. The fit of our Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) provides robust evidence for the construct validity of the measures, mitigating some of the concern from the lower alpha score. Nevertheless, future research could benefit from using alternative or revised measures of competence to ensure higher internal consistency.

## CONCLUSION

This study offers valuable insights into the intricate relationships between competence, relatedness, and authenticity among Turkish adults aged 18-28. Our findings illuminate that both competence and relatedness are significant predictors of authenticity, supporting the theoretical framework of ESW. The moderate strength of these relationships and the fact that they account for 32% of the variance in authenticity underscores the complex nature of authenticity, suggesting the influence of additional factors beyond the scope of this study.

These results have profound implications for theory, practice, and policy. They provide empirical support for key tenets of ESW, particularly the importance of fulfilling basic psychological needs in fostering authenticity. For social workers, our findings highlight the need for holistic interventions that address both the development of personal competencies and the enhancement of meaningful relationships. Policymakers should consider implementing programs that not only support skill development but also foster community connections and social support networks.

For clinical social work practice, these findings underscore the importance of targeting competence and relatedness as pathways to authenticity. Clinical social workers might incorporate strategies from various therapeutic modalities, such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for enhancing perceived competence, Interpersonal Psychotherapy for improving relational skills, and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy for promoting value-aligned, authentic living. The strong association between competence and relatedness also suggests that interventions targeting one of these areas may have positive spillover effects on the other. The study's limitations, including its cross-sectional design and focus on Turkish adults, point to fertile avenues for future research. Longitudinal studies across diverse populations could further elucidate the temporal dynamics of these relationships and enhance the generalizability of findings. Additionally, the moderate explained variance in authenticity warrants further investigation into other potential predictors, such as mindfulness, self-reflection, or cultural factors.

The findings of this study offer several practical implications for social work with youth, which can be framed across micro, mezzo, and macro levels of practice. In direct practice with young adults (micro), social workers should adopt a dual-focus approach that simultaneously builds competence and fosters supportive relationships. To enhance competence, practitioners can move beyond traditional talk therapy to incorporate skill-building interventions. This could include strengths-based case management that helps clients identify their existing talents, as well as concrete training in areas like financial literacy, job-seeking skills, or assertive communication. Empowering clients to master tangible challenges in their environment provides them with the sense of efficacy needed to act in accordance with their true values. To enhance relatedness, the therapeutic alliance itself is a key tool. By offering unconditional positive regard and modeling an authentic, non-judgmental relationship, social workers can provide a secure base from which clients can explore their own identities. Practitioners can also use tools like eco-maps to help clients assess their social support

networks and develop strategies for strengthening positive connections while setting boundaries in unsupportive ones.

At the community and organizational level (mezzo), social workers can design and advocate for programs in schools and youth centers that create environments rich in opportunities for both competence and relatedness. Programs should be designed to foster mastery and skill development, not just to occupy time. This could include project-based learning, arts workshops, coding clubs, or sports teams where youth can experience a tangible sense of accomplishment. These settings must also be intentionally designed to foster a sense of belonging. Social workers can facilitate peer-mentoring programs, restorative justice circles, and group work that encourages mutual support and authentic connection among participants. The goal is to create communities where young people feel safe, seen, and valued, reducing the social isolation that can stifle authenticity.

At the policy level (macro), these findings call for social workers to engage in advocacy that creates a societal context supportive of youth development. Advocacy for competence could involve lobbying for increased funding for vocational education, subsidized internship programs, and policies that reduce barriers to higher education and stable employment for young people. Advocacy for relatedness involves promoting policies that combat social isolation and build community infrastructure. This includes funding for public libraries, community centers, and mental health services in schools, as well as challenging systemic issues like poverty and discrimination that marginalize youth and sever their sense of connection to society.

In conclusion, this research significantly contributes to our understanding of the factors that promote authenticity, highlighting the crucial roles of competence and relatedness. As we navigate an increasingly complex world that often challenges our sense of self, these insights can inform more effective and nuanced strategies for supporting personal growth and authenticity across diverse contexts. Future research should continue to explore the multifaceted nature of authenticity, potentially uncovering additional pathways to living a more genuine and fulfilling life.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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**COMPLIANCE OF ETHICAL STANDARD STATEMENT**

The present study was carried out following the ethical principles of the local university and in compliance with the Ethical Standards of the Declaration of Helsinki from 1964.

**AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT**

All research, analysis, and writing in this manuscript were solely conducted by the author.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The author declared that there is no conflict of interest regarding the research.

## GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

Otantiklik bireyin içsel değerleriyle dış davranışlarının uyum içinde olması ve kendi benliğini toplumsal baskılardan bağımsız biçimde ortaya koyabilmesi anlamına gelmektedir. Bireyin "kendisi olma" kapasitesi sadece psikolojik değil aynı zamanda toplumsal ve ilişkisel bir süreçtir. Otantik bir yaşam sürmek bireyin hem kendisini tanıması hem de çevresiyle sağlıklı ilişkiler kurabilmesiyle mümkündür. Günümüzde otantiklik psikolojik iyi oluşun önemli bir belirleyicisi olarak kabul edilmekte ve bireyin yaşam doyumuna, özsaygısına ve benlik bütünlüğüne katkı sağlamaktadır. Sosyal hizmet alanında da otantiklik kavramı bireyin farkındalığını artıran, içsel kaynaklarını güçlendiren ve sosyal ilişkilerini derinleştiren bir unsur olarak giderek daha fazla önem kazanmaktadır. Sosyal hizmet uygulamalarının temel hedeflerinden biri bireyin otantik benliğiyle uyum içinde yaşamasına ve kendi yaşamına yön verebilmesine yardımcı olmaktır.

Bu araştırma genç yetişkinlerde yetkinlik ve ilişkisellik gibi temel psikolojik ihtiyaçların otantiklik üzerindeki etkilerini incelemektedir. Çalışmanın kuramsal temeli bireyin anlam arayışı, özgürlük, sorumluluk ve benlik bütünlüğü gibi varoluşsal konularla ilgilenen varoluşçu sosyal hizmet yaklaşımına dayanmaktadır. Bu yaklaşım bireyin kendini tanıması, yaşamına anlam kazandırması ve otantik benliğiyle bağlantı kurması süreçlerinde sosyal hizmet uzmanının rehberlik rolünü vurgular. Varoluşçu sosyal hizmet bakış açısına göre bireyin psikolojik ihtiyaçlarının karşılanması onun otantik bir yaşam sürmesini kolaylaştırır. Özellikle yetkinlik ve ilişkisellik bireyin hem kendini gerçekleştirmesi hem de anlamlı sosyal bağlar kurabilmesi açısından belirleyici öneme sahiptir. Yetkinlik, bireyin çevresine etkin biçimde uyum sağlama, hedeflerine ulaşma ve kendi yaşamı üzerinde kontrol sahibi olma kapasitesidir. İlişkisellik ise bireyin kendisini değerli, kabul edilmiş ve başkalarıyla bağlantı içinde hissetmesini sağlayan bir ihtiyaçtır. Her iki unsurun da doyumu bireyin kendi değerleriyle uyumlu davranabilmesine yani otantik bir yaşam sürdürebilmesine zemin hazırlar.

Araştırmanın temel amacı yetkinlik ve ilişkiselliğin otantiklik üzerindeki eş zamanlı etkilerini ortaya koymaktır. Çalışma aynı zamanda otantiklikle ilgili literatürdeki boşluğu doldurmayı ve sosyal hizmet uygulamalarına kuramsal ve ampirik katkı sağlamayı amaçlamaktadır. Araştırma nicel ve kesitsel bir desende yürütülmüştür. Veriler 2024 yılı Ağustos ayında çevrimiçi anket aracılığıyla toplanmıştır. Etik izin Bartın Üniversitesi Sosyal ve Beşeri Bilimler Etik Kurulu tarafından verilmiştir. Katılımcılar amaçlı örnekleme yöntemiyle belirlenmiş; dahil edilme ölçütleri olarak 18–28 yaş arasında, Türkiye'de ikamet eden ve Türk vatandaşı olan bireyler seçilmiştir. Çalışmaya 310 gönüllü katılmıştır. Katılımcıların demografik özelliklerine bakıldığında %67.7'sinin kadın, %32.3'ünün erkek olduğu ve yaş ortalamasının 20.00 olduğu görülmüştür. Katılımcılara temel psikolojik ihtiyaçların doyumunu ölçmek üzere 25 maddelik bir ölçek, otantiklik düzeyini ölçmek üzere 12 maddelik bir ölçek ve demografik bilgi formu uygulanmıştır. Elde edilen verilerin analizi SPSS 22.0 ve AMOS 20.0 programları kullanılarak gerçekleştirilmiştir. İlk olarak değişkenlere ait betimsel istatistikler (ortalama,

standart sapma) ve değişkenler arası ilişkileri incelemek amacıyla Pearson korelasyon analizi yapılmıştır. Ardından kurulan hipotez modelinin test edilmesi amacıyla Yapısal Eşitlik Modellemesi (YEM) analizi uygulanmıştır. YEM süreci iki aşamada yürütülmüştür: İlk olarak ölçeklerin yapı geçerliğini doğrulamak amacıyla Doğrulayıcı Faktör Analizi (DFA) ile ölçüm modeli test edilmiş; ikinci olarak ise değişkenler arasındaki nedensel ilişkileri test etmek için yapısal model analiz edilmiştir.

Analiz sonuçları ölçüm modellerinin kabul edilebilir düzeyde uyum gösterdiğini ve değişkenler arasındaki ilişkilerin anlamlı olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Bulgulara göre hem yetkinlik hem de ilişkisellik otantiklik üzerinde pozitif ve anlamlı etkilere sahiptir. Her iki değişken birlikte otantiklikteki toplam varyansın %32'sini açıklamaktadır. Ayrıca yetkinlik ve ilişkisellik arasında güçlü bir pozitif ilişki bulunmuştur. Bu sonuç bireyin hem kendine güven duygusu hem de sosyal bağlantılarının otantik yaşamın temelini oluşturduğunu göstermektedir. Kendisini yeterli, etkili ve ilişkisel olarak bağlı hisseden bireylerin içsel değerleriyle daha uyumlu kararlar alabildikleri ve davranışlarını bu değerlere göre şekillendirdikleri görülmektedir. Bu bulgu bireyin hem bireysel hem de ilişkisel düzeyde desteklenmesinin otantikliğinin sağlanması için önemli bir potansiyel yarattığını ortaya koymaktadır.

Elde edilen bulgular sosyal hizmet uygulamaları açısından önemli pratik sonuçlar sunmaktadır. Otantiklik sosyal hizmetin merkezinde yer alan insan onuru, öz-yeterlik, özgürlük ve sosyal adalet gibi değerlere doğrudan katkı sağlamaktadır. Bireylerin yetkinlik duygularını güçlendirmek için yapılan beceri geliştirme, öz-farkındalık ve problem çözme temelli müdahaleler, onların yaşamlarına daha fazla yön verebilmelerine yardımcı olabilir. Benzer şekilde bireylerin sosyal destek ağlarını güçlendiren, empatik ve anlamlı ilişkiler kurmalarını teşvik eden grup çalışmaları, ilişkisellik ihtiyacının doyumuna katkı sunabilir. Böylelikle sosyal hizmet uzmanları, bireylerin hem kendilerini tanımalarını hem de toplumsal bağlamda otantik bir yaşam sürmelerini destekleyebilir. Bu yaklaşım bireyin kendi değerleriyle tutarlı biçimde yaşamasını ve yaşamına anlam kazandırmasını kolaylaştırır.

Araştırmanın bulguları klinik sosyal hizmet alanında çalışan uzmanlar için de yönlendirici niteliktedir. Özellikle genç yetişkinlerle yapılan çalışmalarda otantiklik düzeyini artırmak amacıyla hem bireysel hem de ilişkisel temelli müdahalelerin birlikte ele alınması gerekmektedir. Sosyal hizmet uzmanları müracaatçılarının öz-yeterliklerini güçlendirirken aynı zamanda güven temelli ilişkiler kurmalarına aracılık edebilir. Bu tür bütüncül yaklaşımlar bireylerin yaşam doyumlarını ve psikolojik dayanıklılıklarını artırabilir. Ayrıca sosyal hizmetin mikro, mezzo ve makro düzeydeki tüm uygulama alanlarında yetkinlik ve ilişkiselliği destekleyen politikaların geliştirilmesi önemlidir. Mikro düzeyde bireysel danışmanlık ve psikososyal destek hizmetlerinde otantik benlik farkındalığına odaklanılabilir. Mezzo düzeyde okul, gençlik merkezi veya toplum temelli programlar aracılığıyla genç yetişkinlerin hem beceri geliştirmeleri hem de sosyal bağlarını güçlendirmeleri sağlanabilir. Makro düzeyde ise sosyal politikalar aracılığıyla gençlerin eğitim, istihdam ve katılım olanaklarını

artırmak onların hem yetkinlik hem de ilişkisellik ihtiyaçlarını destekleyerek otantik yaşamı teşvik edebilir.

Bu araştırmanın bir diğer katkısı otantiklik kavramının kültürel boyutuna ışık tutmasıdır. Türkiye'deki genç yetişkinlerin kültürel olarak hem bireycilik hem de toplulukçuluk değerlerini bir arada taşıması, otantiklik deneyimini daha karmaşık bir hale getirmektedir. Bir yandan bireyler kendi değerleri doğrultusunda özgür biçimde yaşama arzusu taşırken diğer yandan toplumsal beklentilerle uyum içinde olma ihtiyacı hissedebilmektedirler. Bu durum hem yetkinlik hem de ilişkiselliğin otantiklik üzerindeki etkisinin kültürel bağlama göre farklılaşabileceğini göstermektedir. Dolayısıyla sosyal hizmet uygulamalarında kültürel duyarlılığın artırılması müracaatçıların kendi yaşam bağlamları içinde otantik benliklerini keşfetmelerine katkı sağlayabilir.

Çalışmanın sınırlılıkları arasında kesitsel veri toplama yöntemi ve örneklemin kısmen homojen yapısı yer almaktadır. Verilerin yalnızca öz-bildirim formlarıyla toplanmış olması katılımcıların öznel değerlendirmelerine dayalı olabileceği için nesnelliği sınırlayabilir. Ayrıca araştırma sadece genç yetişkinlerle sınırlı olduğundan farklı yaş gruplarında yürütülecek çalışmalar otantiklik, yetkinlik ve ilişkisellik arasındaki ilişkilerin gelişimsel farklılıklarını ortaya koyabilir. Gelecek araştırmalarda boylamsal veya nitel desenlerin kullanılması bireylerin otantik benliklerini nasıl inşa ettiklerini ve bu süreçte sosyal bağların nasıl rol oynadığını derinlemesine anlamaya katkı sağlayabilir.

Sonuç olarak bu çalışma bireylerin otantik yaşamlarını desteklemede yetkinlik ve ilişkiselliğin birlikte ele alınması gerektiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Bireyin kendi yaşamını yönlendirme gücü ile diğerleriyle kurduğu anlamlı ilişkiler arasında kurulan bu denge otantikliğin özünü oluşturmaktadır. Bulgular sosyal hizmet uzmanlarına müracaatçılarının otantik benlikleriyle daha uyumlu bir yaşam sürmelerine rehberlik edecek somut yollar sunmaktadır. Yetkinlik ve ilişkisellik temelli müdahalelerin artırılması sadece bireysel iyi oluşu değil aynı zamanda toplumsal dayanışmayı ve insan onurunu da güçlendirecektir. Bu yönüyle araştırma varoluşçu sosyal hizmet yaklaşımının temel ilkeleriyle uyumlu bir biçimde otantik yaşamın sosyal hizmet mesleği açısından taşıdığı değeri bilimsel olarak ortaya koymaktadır.

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