

Dimensions of Anomie among University Students from a Values Perspective: A Systematic Literature Review and Thematic Synthesis

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Abstract

Anomie has become an important concern in higher education because of its associations with students' psychological well-being, social integration, and moral development. However, existing research remains fragmented across related constructs such as alienation, cynicism, deviance, and value conflict. This study systematically identifies and synthesizes the dimensions of anomie among university students from a value-oriented perspective. A systematic literature review was conducted following the PRISMA framework. Studies were retrieved from Scopus, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, and ERIC, with 33 studies included in the final thematic synthesis. The findings identify four core dimensions of anomie: meaninglessness and distrust, powerlessness, moral decline, and fetishism of money. These dimensions are associated with structural instability, alienation, social cynicism, weakened moral regulation, and value conflict. The synthesis further indicates that anomie reflects not only social and institutional conditions but also individual value disorientation. Self-enhancing values appear to contribute to anomie, whereas socially oriented values may mitigate its manifestations. By integrating fragmented findings into a value-oriented multidimensional framework, this study contributes to understanding anomie among university students and offers implications for strengthening meaning, moral commitment, and value development in higher education.

Keywords: Anomie, University Students, Values, Thematic Synthesis, Alienation, Higher Education

Introduction

Anomie has long been a central concept in sociology and psychology for explaining social disorder, normlessness, and the weakening of moral regulation. Classical theorists such as Durkheim conceptualized anomie as a breakdown of social cohesion, while Merton

emphasized the structural strain arising from the disjunction between culturally defined goals and socially available means. While these perspectives provide important theoretical foundations, contemporary research increasingly highlights the need to examine anomie at the individual level, particularly in relation to value systems and subjective experiences (Konty, 2005).

In recent years, the study of anomie has expanded beyond structural explanations to incorporate cognitive and value-oriented perspectives. For example, Konty (2005) reconceptualizes anomie as a micro-level cognitive condition characterized by the dominance of self-enhancing values over socially oriented values, suggesting that anomie is closely linked to value disorientation rather than merely institutional breakdown. Similarly, empirical studies have shown that anomie is often associated with distrust, cynicism, and weakened commitment to social norms, indicating that it reflects both a psychological and moral condition (Brockway et al., 2002; He & Tong, 2024).

University students represent a particularly important population for examining anomie. As individuals undergoing significant developmental, social, and academic transitions, they are more likely to experience uncertainty, identity confusion, and value conflicts. Empirical evidence suggests that anomie among university students is associated with a wide range of outcomes, including academic dishonesty, reduced motivation, and psychological distress. For instance, studies have found that higher levels of anomie significantly predict unethical behaviors such as cheating and plagiarism (Caruana et al., 2000; Alkhazaleh & Abojedi, 2025). In addition, anomie has been linked to decreased motivation and disengagement, as students lose confidence in the value of effort and social norms (Norasakkunkit & Uchida, 2011).

Moreover, a growing body of research indicates that the experiences of anomie among university students are closely related to constructs such as alienation and meaninglessness. Studies on student alienation consistently report feelings of powerlessness, disconnection, and lack of purpose, which align with key dimensions of anomie (Dar & Jan, 2022; Tarquin & Cook-Cottone, 2008). Longitudinal research further demonstrates that interpersonal alienation is associated with a diminished sense of meaning in life, which in turn contributes to maladaptive behaviors such as addiction (Hu et al., 2022). These findings suggest that anomie is not a single-dimensional construct but rather a complex phenomenon involving multiple psychological and value-related dimensions.

Despite increasing attention to anomie in higher education contexts, the existing literature remains conceptually fragmented. Prior research has examined related constructs such as alienation, cynicism, and deviance, yet these perspectives are rarely integrated into a unified framework. More specifically, empirical studies have tended to examine these constructs separately, emphasizing particular manifestations such as powerlessness, meaninglessness, distrust, weakened normative commitment, or deviant behavior, without clarifying how these overlapping dimensions collectively reflect disruptions in students' relationships with social norms and values. Moreover, although value-related factors are frequently mentioned, their role in shaping the multidimensional structure of anomie has not been systematically examined. This fragmentation is particularly important in the university context because students are undergoing a transitional period in which increasing autonomy, changing institutional expectations, and exposure to diverse social influences may generate tensions

between personal aspirations, social norms, and broader value systems. A systematic synthesis focused specifically on university students is therefore needed to bring these dispersed findings together and clarify the multidimensional and value-related characteristics of anomie within this population.

To address these gaps, this study adopts a value-oriented perspective and conducts a systematic literature review combined with thematic synthesis. The aim is to identify the core dimensions of anomie among university students and to examine how these dimensions can be understood through underlying value mechanisms. Unlike previous studies that have largely examined individual manifestations of anomie and related constructs separately, this review integrates these dispersed perspectives into a student-specific, value-oriented thematic framework. Its novelty lies in systematically synthesizing the multidimensional manifestations of anomie among university students and clarifying how these dimensions intersect with value disorientation, normative disconnection, and related social experiences. In doing so, the review provides a more coherent conceptual foundation for understanding anomie in higher education and for guiding future empirical research.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 presents the research questions guiding the review. Section 3 describes the methodology, including the PRISMA-based screening process and thematic synthesis approach. Section 4 presents the findings of the review, while Section 5 discusses the theoretical and practical implications of the findings from a value-oriented perspective. Finally, Section 6 concludes the study and outlines directions for future research.

Research Questions

Accordingly, this study is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1. What are the key dimensions of anomie among university students identified in the existing literature?

RQ2. How are these dimensions conceptualized and synthesized across the reviewed studies?

RQ3. How can these dimensions be interpreted from a value-oriented perspective?

RQ4. What role do values play in shaping anomie among university students?

Methods

Research Design

This study employed a systematic literature review and thematic synthesis approach to examine the dimensions of anomie among university students from a value-oriented perspective.

The systematic review approach ensures transparency, replicability, and rigor in identifying and synthesizing relevant studies, while thematic synthesis enables the extraction of recurring conceptual patterns across the literature.

This systematic literature review was conducted and reported in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) guidelines. The PRISMA framework was used to guide the identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion of studies to ensure transparency, rigor, and reproducibility

throughout the review process. The completed PRISMA 2020 checklist is provided as Supplementary Material.

Search Strategy

A comprehensive literature search was conducted across multiple academic databases, including Scopus, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, and ERIC, to ensure broad coverage of relevant studies. Although Web of Science was not included due to access limitations, the selected databases provide substantial coverage of high-quality peer-reviewed research.

The literature search covered publications from January 2000 to March 19, 2026, to capture contemporary developments in anomie research in higher education contexts. Earlier studies were excluded to ensure relevance to modern social and value transformations.

Search terms included combinations of:

“anomie” OR “alienation” OR “normlessness”

“university students” OR “college students”

“values” OR “morality” OR “social norms”

The search strategy focused on peer-reviewed studies published in English and employed combinations of the following keywords:

(anomie OR "social disintegration" OR normlessness OR "social alienation")

AND ("university students" OR "college students" OR undergraduates OR "higher education")

AND (meaninglessness OR powerlessness OR "moral decline" OR materialism OR "fetishism of money")

To increase retrieval sensitivity, alternative terms such as alienation, cynicism, and value conflict were also included during the search process.

This review was not prospectively registered in PROSPERO or any other review registry. The study was conducted in accordance with the PRISMA 2020 reporting guidelines.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Studies were selected based on the following criteria:

Inclusion Criteria

Peer-reviewed journal articles

Published between January 2000 and March 19, 2026

Focus on university/college students or youth populations relevant to anomie-related dimensions

Empirical or theoretical studies examining anomie or closely related constructs (e.g., alienation, cynicism, normlessness, deviance, and value conflict).

Exclusion Criteria

Non-academic publications

Studies not related to university students

Duplicate records

Studies without relevance to anomie

Screening Process (PRISMA)

The screening process followed the PRISMA protocol:

Identification

Records identified through database searching (n = 992)

Screening

Records after duplicates removed (n = 908)

Records screened (n = 908)

Records excluded based on title and abstract (n = 825)

Eligibility.

Full-text articles assessed for eligibility (n = 83)

Full-text articles excluded (n = 50)

Inclusion

Studies included in final synthesis (n = 33)

The study selection process followed the PRISMA 2020 guidelines and is presented in Figure 1. Titles and abstracts were screened against the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Potentially eligible studies were subsequently assessed through full-text review before final inclusion in the thematic synthesis.

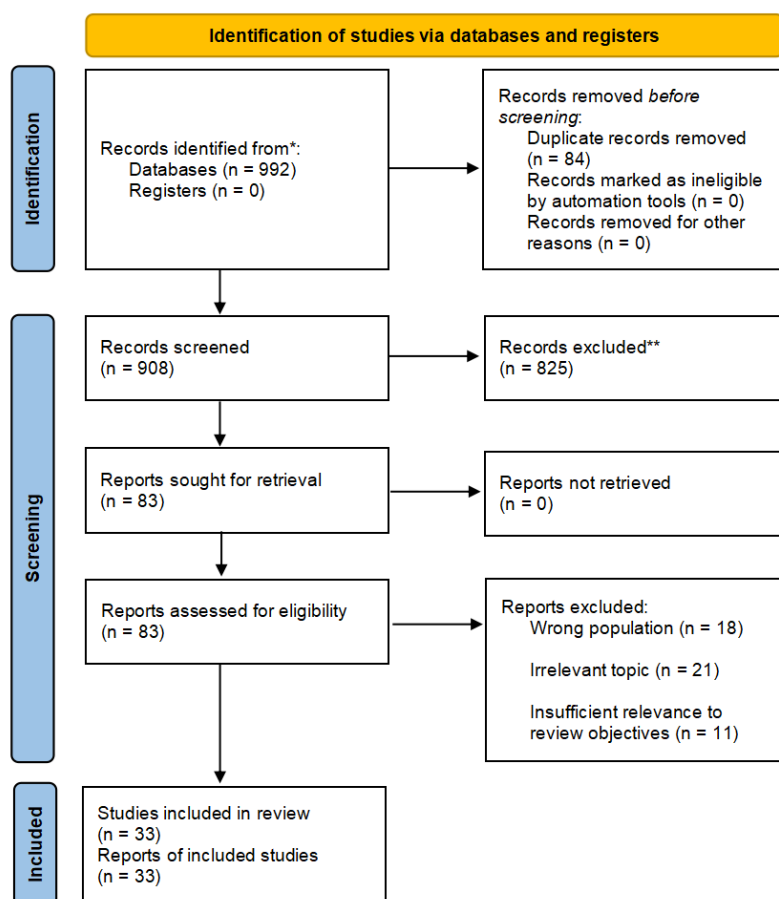


Figure 1 PRISMA flow diagram of the study selection process

The screening process was conducted by the author through title, abstract, and full-text review based on the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. All records were screened by the author through title, abstract, and full-text review. Because this review was conducted by a single reviewer, no inter-reviewer disagreement resolution procedure was required.

Data Extraction and Coding

A standardized data extraction form was used to systematically code the selected studies. The following information was extracted:

Author(s) and year
Country/region
Sample characteristics
Research design
Conceptualization of anomie
Key findings
Identified dimensions of anomie

Data extraction was conducted by the author using a standardized extraction form. All extracted data were recorded and organized prior to coding and thematic synthesis.

The coding process focused particularly on identifying value-related dimensions and psychological manifestations of anomie. The extracted information was reviewed multiple times by the researcher to ensure consistency and accuracy before thematic synthesis. Table 1 Coding of Included Studies (n = 33)

No.	Author (Year)	Country	Sample	Method	Main Construct	Key Finding	Dimension
1	Ådnanes (2007)	Bulgaria	Youth	Qualitative	Social anomie	Social transition increased uncertainty and distrust	Meaninglessness & Distrust
2	Akhayeva & Turgunbayeva (2023)	Kazakhstan	Undergraduates	Experimental	Anomie	Anti-corruption education reduced perceptions of anomie	Moral Decline
3	Al-Habies et al. (2025)	Jordan	Foreign students	Experimental	Alienation	Intervention significantly reduced alienation	Powerlessness
4	Alkhazaleh & Abojedi (2025)	Jordan	University students	Survey	Social anomie	Anomie positively predicted academic dishonesty	Moral Decline
5	Atila & Dönmez (2023)	Turkey	University students	Quantitative	School alienation	Classroom connectedness reduced alienation	Powerlessness
6	Baron (2011)	Canada	Street youth	Quantitative	Anomie theory	Weak normative regulation associated with crime	Moral Decline
7	Benjamin et al. (2025)	Finland	Youth	Qualitative	Othering	Social exclusion weakened belonging and trust	Meaninglessness & Distrust
8	Borinca et al. (2024)	International	Adults	Quantitative	Social norms	Norms promoted social harmony and peace	Moral Decline
9	Brockway et al. (2002)	USA	College students	Scale validation	Cynicism	Cynical attitudes reflected distrust toward institutions	Meaninglessness & Distrust
10	Caruana et al. (2000)	Australia	University students	Survey	Anomie	Anomie increased academic dishonesty	Moral Decline

No.	Author (Year)	Country	Sample	Method	Main Construct	Key Finding	Dimension
11	Challand (2015)	Tunisia	Youth	Qualitative	Alienation	Marginalization generated disconnection and alienation	Meaninglessness & Distrust
12	Cetin (2020)	UK	Kurdish youth	Qualitative	Anomie	Unregulated desires encouraged deviant group identity	Fetishism of Money
13	Collins & Menard (2017)	USA	Gang members	Quantitative	Anomie theory	Anomie explained gang violence	Moral Decline
14	Dar & Jan (2022)	India	University students	Scale validation	Student alienation	Alienation associated with problematic ICT motives	Powerlessness
15	Dar & Jan (2021)	India	University students	Scale development	ICT motives	ICT dependence related to alienation	Powerlessness
16	Goldie (2004)	UK	Medical students	Commentary	Cynicism	Ethical cynicism undermined professional values	Moral Decline
17	He & Tong (2024)	China	University students	Longitudinal	Social axioms	Distrust beliefs reduced well-being	Meaninglessness & Distrust
18	Hu et al. (2022)	China	University students	Longitudinal	Alienation	Alienation increased smartphone addiction	Meaninglessness
19	Kartal (2018)	Turkey	Students	Qualitative	Alienation	Media skepticism fostered alienation	Meaninglessness & Distrust
20	Konty (2005)	USA	General population	Quantitative	Microanomie	Value imbalance increased deviance	Fetishism of Money
21	Mahoney & Quick (2000)	USA	University students	Survey	Alienation	Alienation linked with maladaptive personality traits	Powerlessness
22	Norasakkunkit & Uchida (2011)	Japan	Youth	Quantitative	Postindustrial anomie	Anomie reduced motivation and meaning	Meaninglessness
23	Qian & Pun (2025)	China	Online youth community	Critical analysis	Radical ideology	Value disorientation reflected anomic tendencies	Meaninglessness & Distrust
24	Raba'ah Hamzah et al. (2013)	Malaysia	Undergraduates	Survey	Hedonism	Peer influence promoted hedonistic behavior	Fetishism of Money
25	Rickman & Solomon (2007)	USA	Youth subculture	Qualitative	Anomie	Online subcultures emerged under value disorientation	Meaninglessness
26	Sasani & Javidnejat (2015)	USA (literary context)	Youth representation	Discourse analysis	Alienation	Identity crisis reflected youth alienation	Meaninglessness
27	Tarquin & Cook-Cottone (2008)	USA	Students	Survey	Student alienation	Alienation negatively associated with self-concept	Powerlessness
28	Thorlindsson & Bernburg (2009)	Iceland	Adolescents	Quantitative	Anomie	Structural instability increased suicidal behavior	Meaninglessness
29	Wang & Shao (2017)	China	University students	Quantitative	Moral outlook	Media exposure reshaped moral values	Moral Decline
30	Xu et al. (2024)	China	College students	Survey	Legal emotion	Weak legal emotion increased aggression	Moral Decline
31	Yu et al. (2019)	China	Street children	Qualitative	Institutional anomie	Institutional failure facilitated delinquency	Moral Decline
32	Zhong et al. (2025)	China	College students	Survey	Burnout	Psychological distress increased alienation-related outcomes	Meaninglessness
33	Zhou et al. (2025)	China	College students	Survey	Alienation	Alienation mediated social anxiety and addiction	Meaninglessness

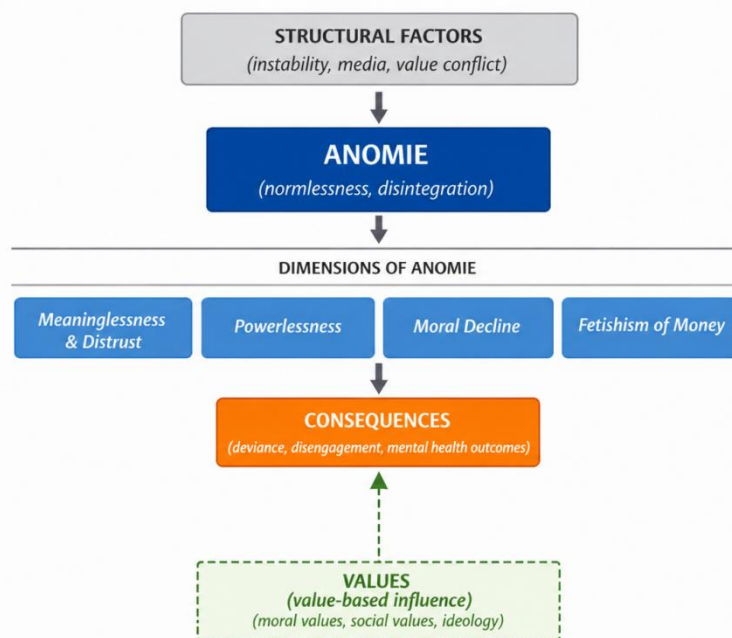


Figure 2 A Value-Oriented Thematic Framework of Anomie among University Students

This figure presents a value-oriented thematic framework of anomie among university students derived from the systematic literature review. Structural factors such as instability, media environments, and value conflicts contribute to the emergence of anomie. Anomie is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct consisting of meaninglessness and distrust, powerlessness, moral decline, and fetishism of money. These dimensions are associated with behavioral and psychological consequences, including deviance, disengagement, and mental health issues. Importantly, values function as a value-based influence, shaping both the development and consequences of anomie.

This framework corresponds to the study's research questions by illustrating the dimensions (RQ1), their integration (RQ2), value-based interpretation (RQ3), and the role of values (RQ4).

Quality Assessment of Included Studies

Given the conceptual and thematic nature of the review and the diversity of study designs included, no formal risk-of-bias assessment tool was applied.

Instead, methodological quality was considered during the review process through an evaluation of the clarity of research objectives, appropriateness of study design, transparency of data collection procedures, and relevance to the review objectives.

Studies with insufficient methodological information or limited relevance to the review objectives were considered with caution during the synthesis process.

Thematic Synthesis

Thematic synthesis was conducted to systematically identify, integrate, and interpret the dimensions of anomie across the selected studies. The process followed three stages.

First, initial coding was performed through line-by-line analysis of relevant findings in each study. Codes were generated inductively to capture key concepts related to anomie, including psychological experiences, behavioral outcomes, and value-related patterns.

Second, descriptive themes were developed by grouping similar codes into broader categories. At this stage, recurring patterns across studies were identified, leading to the classification of major dimensions of anomie.

Third, analytical themes were constructed to provide higher-level interpretations of the data. These themes were further refined to align with the research questions of the study. Specifically, the identification of recurring dimensions addressed RQ1, while the integration of diverse constructs such as alienation, social cynicism, strain, and deviance contributed to RQ2.

In addition, interpretive analysis was applied to examine how these dimensions reflect underlying value mechanisms, thereby addressing RQ3. Finally, cross-study comparisons were conducted to explore how value systems influence the development and manifestation of anomie, providing evidence for RQ4.

This approach ensured that the thematic synthesis moved beyond descriptive aggregation toward a theoretically grounded, value-oriented interpretation of anomie.

Reporting Bias and Certainty Assessment

Additional methodological considerations were also addressed in accordance with the PRISMA 2020 guidelines.

No formal statistical assessment of reporting bias was conducted because this review employed thematic synthesis rather than meta-analysis. Nevertheless, efforts were made to minimize potential reporting bias through comprehensive database searching and the application of predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Due to the qualitative nature of the review and the absence of quantitative effect-size synthesis, no formal certainty assessment framework (e.g., GRADE) was applied.

Results: Thematic Synthesis of Anomie Dimensions

The methodological quality of the included studies was considered during the synthesis process and interpretation of findings.

Overview of Included Studies

The final sample consisted of 33 empirical studies examining anomie or conceptually related constructs among university students and youth populations. The studies were conducted across diverse geographical contexts, including North America, Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, reflecting the global relevance of anomie in higher education settings.

Methodologically, the majority of studies employed quantitative approaches, such as cross-sectional surveys and longitudinal designs, while a smaller number adopted mixed methods. Conceptually, the reviewed studies addressed anomie either directly or indirectly through

related constructs, including alienation, social cynicism, strain, and deviant behavior. This conceptual diversity supports the need for thematic synthesis to integrate fragmented findings into a coherent framework.

The methodological quality of the included studies was considered during the synthesis process. Although no formal risk of bias scoring tool was applied, studies with clear objectives, appropriate designs, and transparent reporting were prioritized in the interpretation of findings.

Dimensions of Anomie among University Students

The thematic synthesis identified four core dimensions of anomie among university students: meaninglessness and distrust, powerlessness, moral decline, and fetishism of money.

Meaninglessness and Distrust

Meaninglessness and distrust emerged as the most prominent dimension of anomie across the reviewed studies. Evidence consistently indicates that students experiencing anomie report a diminished sense of purpose and weakened confidence in social institutions. For instance, longitudinal findings show that interpersonal alienation is associated with reduced meaning in life, which in turn contributes to maladaptive outcomes such as behavioral addiction (Hu et al., 2022).

In addition, research on social axioms suggests that social cynicism, defined as a generalized distrust toward institutions and authorities, is negatively associated with well-being and positively associated with psychological distress (Brockway et al., 2002; He & Tong, 2024). Taken together, these findings suggest that meaninglessness and distrust reflect a breakdown of both personal meaning and normative confidence.

From a value-oriented perspective, this dimension can be understood as a form of value disorientation, in which individuals lose alignment with shared social values and normative frameworks.

Powerlessness

Powerlessness represents another prominent dimension of anomie identified across the literature. This dimension reflects individuals' perceived inability to influence outcomes, control their circumstances, or effectively engage with institutional structures.

Research on student alienation provides strong support for this dimension. Studies have shown that university students frequently experience feelings of helplessness, disengagement, and lack of control over academic processes (Dar & Jan, 2022). These experiences are often manifested as reduced motivation, academic withdrawal, and passive participation.

Similarly, earlier research has conceptualized powerlessness as a key component of alienation, linking it to disengagement and reduced agency in institutional settings (Tarquin & Cook-Cottone, 2008). The findings suggest that powerlessness is closely associated with diminished participation and weakened commitment to academic and social roles.

Taken together, these studies indicate that powerlessness reflects a psychological manifestation of anomie in which students feel disconnected from decision-making processes and unable to shape their own outcomes.

Moral Decline

Moral decline represents the behavioral dimension of anomie and is frequently manifested in unethical practices such as academic dishonesty. Empirical evidence indicates that higher levels of anomie are associated with increased tolerance of norm-violating behaviors, including cheating and plagiarism (Caruana et al., 2000; Alkhazaleh & Abojedi, 2025).

Importantly, these behaviors are not merely individual choices but reflect deeper processes of value erosion. When social norms are perceived as weak or inconsistent, individuals may prioritize instrumental success over ethical commitments. In this context, academic dishonesty can be interpreted as a manifestation of weakened moral regulation under conditions of anomie.

Furthermore, value-based interventions, such as moral and civic education, have been shown to reduce perceptions of anomie and promote ethical behavior. This highlights the role of value systems in both explaining and mitigating moral decline.

Fetishism of Money

Although less frequently examined than other dimensions, fetishism of money represents an important value-oriented dimension of anomie. This dimension refers to the excessive prioritization of material success and self-interest over collective and moral values.

The concept is most clearly articulated in micro-level anomie theory, which posits that individuals experiencing anomie tend to prioritize self-enhancing values over self-transcending values (Konty, 2005). This value imbalance is associated with increased likelihood of deviant behavior.

Empirical studies on materialism and value orientation further support this dimension, showing that a strong emphasis on economic success and personal gain is associated with reduced well-being and increased dissatisfaction. This suggests that materialistic value systems may contribute to the development of anomie by undermining social cohesion and moral commitment. Overall, the findings indicate that fetishism of money reflects a value-based manifestation of anomie, highlighting the importance of integrating value perspectives into its analysis.

Thematic Synthesis and Conceptual Integration

Across the reviewed studies, anomie is conceptualized through a range of related constructs, including alienation, social cynicism, strain, and deviance. Although these constructs originate from different theoretical traditions, the thematic synthesis reveals that they converge on a common set of underlying dimensions. Alienation-based studies primarily emphasize psychological experiences such as meaninglessness and powerlessness, while social cognition approaches focus on distrust and cynicism toward institutions (Brockway et al., 2002; He & Tong, 2024). At the same time, strain and deviance frameworks highlight behavioral outcomes, particularly moral decline and norm-violating behavior (Caruana et al., 2000;

Alkhazaleh & Abojedi, 2025). Taken together, these perspectives can be systematically integrated into a multidimensional framework of anomie. This synthesis demonstrates that seemingly distinct constructs represent different manifestations of the same underlying phenomenon, thereby addressing fragmentation in the existing literature.

Value-Oriented Interpretation of Anomie Dimensions

From a value-oriented perspective, the four dimensions of anomie can be understood as manifestations of value disorientation at different levels. Meaninglessness and distrust reflect a disruption in shared value systems and a weakening of normative beliefs. Powerlessness indicates a loss of value-based agency, where individuals are unable to act in accordance with meaningful goals or socially endorsed values. Moral decline represents the erosion of internalized moral norms, while fetishism of money reflects a distortion of value priorities toward materialistic and self-enhancing orientations.

These findings suggest that anomie is fundamentally rooted in value imbalance rather than solely structural instability. In particular, the dominance of self-enhancing values over self-transcending values has been identified as a key mechanism underlying anomie (Konty, 2005). Taken together, the results indicate that the multidimensional structure of anomie can be coherently interpreted through value-based mechanisms, providing a deeper theoretical explanation beyond traditional structural accounts.

The Role of Values in Shaping Anomie

A central finding of this review is the critical role of values in shaping both the development and outcomes of anomie among university students. The evidence suggests that value systems influence how individuals interpret social conditions and respond to uncertainty. The dominance of self-enhancing values is consistently associated with higher levels of anomie, whereas socially oriented values appear to mitigate its effects (Konty, 2005).

Furthermore, empirical studies indicate that value-based interventions, such as moral and civic education, can reduce perceptions of normlessness and promote ethical behavior. These findings highlight that values function not only as underlying mechanisms of anomie but also as potential moderating factors. Overall, the results demonstrate that values play a dual role in shaping anomie, both reinforcing and alleviating its multidimensional manifestations.

Discussion

Overview: Answering the Research Questions

The findings of this study provide direct and systematic answers to the four research questions. First, the review identifies four core dimensions of anomie among university students (RQ1). Second, these dimensions are synthesized across diverse theoretical and empirical traditions, addressing fragmentation in the literature (RQ2). Third, the results demonstrate that these dimensions can be coherently interpreted from a value-oriented perspective (RQ3). Finally, the study highlights the central role of values in shaping both the development and consequences of anomie (RQ4).

RQ1: A Multidimensional Understanding of Anomie

The identification of four core dimensions—meaninglessness and distrust, powerlessness, moral decline, and fetishism of money—supports the view that anomie among university

students is a multidimensional construct rather than a single condition. This finding extends prior research that has often examined isolated aspects of anomie, such as alienation or deviant behavior, without integrating them into a unified framework. The present synthesis demonstrates that these dimensions capture cognitive (meaninglessness and distrust), psychological (powerlessness), behavioral (moral decline), and value-oriented (fetishism of money) aspects of anomie. This multidimensional perspective provides a more comprehensive understanding of how anomie is experienced at the individual level, particularly in higher education contexts.

RQ2: Integrating Fragmented Conceptualizations

One of the key contributions of this study lies in addressing the conceptual fragmentation of anomie-related research. The literature on anomie has been dispersed across multiple constructs, including alienation, social cynicism, strain, and deviance, each emphasizing different aspects of the phenomenon.

By applying thematic synthesis, this study demonstrates that these constructs can be systematically integrated into a coherent framework. Alienation-based studies primarily capture experiences of meaninglessness and powerlessness, while social cognition approaches emphasize distrust and cynicism (Brockway et al., 2002; He & Tong, 2024). At the same time, strain and deviance perspectives highlight moral decline as a behavioral outcome (Caruana et al., 2000; Alkhazaleh & Abojedi, 2025). This integration contributes to theoretical clarity by showing that these diverse constructs represent different manifestations of the same underlying phenomenon—*anomie*—thereby advancing a more unified conceptualization.

RQ3: Reinterpreting Anomie from a Value-Oriented Perspective

A central theoretical contribution of this study is the reinterpretation of anomie as a value-based phenomenon. While classical theories emphasize structural factors such as normlessness and social regulation, the present findings suggest that anomie is fundamentally rooted in value disorientation. Each of the four dimensions can be understood as reflecting disruptions in value systems. Meaninglessness and distrust indicate a breakdown of shared values and normative beliefs, while powerlessness reflects a loss of value-based agency. Moral decline represents the erosion of internalized ethical standards, and fetishism of money reflects the dominance of materialistic and self-enhancing values.

In particular, micro-level anomie theory highlights that the imbalance between self-enhancing and self-transcending values plays a crucial role in shaping anomie (Konty, 2005). This perspective extends traditional anomie theory by integrating psychological and value-based mechanisms into its explanation. Taken together, these findings suggest that anomie should not be understood solely as a structural condition but as a crisis of values at the individual level.

RQ4: The Role of Values in Shaping Anomie

The findings also underscore the critical role of values in shaping both the emergence and consequences of anomie. Value systems influence how individuals interpret social conditions, respond to uncertainty, and regulate their behavior.

The dominance of self-enhancing values is consistently associated with higher levels of anomie, as individuals prioritize personal success over collective norms (Konty, 2005). Conversely, socially oriented values, including moral and civic commitments, appear to mitigate anomie by reinforcing normative structures and ethical behavior.

Importantly, empirical evidence suggests that value-based interventions, such as moral and civic education, can reduce perceptions of anomie and promote ethical conduct. This indicates that values function not only as underlying mechanisms but also as practical levers for addressing anomie in educational settings. Thus, values play a dual role in shaping anomie, acting both as a source of its development and as a means of its regulation.

Theoretical Implications

This study makes three main theoretical contributions. First, it advances a multidimensional understanding of anomie by integrating diverse constructs into a coherent framework. Second, it extends anomie theory from a structural perspective to a value-oriented framework, highlighting the importance of value systems in shaping individual experiences. Third, it bridges the gap between sociological and psychological approaches by demonstrating how structural conditions are internalized through value-based mechanisms. Together, these contributions provide a more comprehensive and theoretically grounded understanding of anomie in contemporary higher education contexts.

Practical Implications for Higher Education

The findings have important implications for higher education institutions. Interventions aimed at reducing anomie should not focus solely on academic performance but also address students' psychological and value-related needs. In particular, universities should emphasize value-based education, including ethical training, civic engagement, and the promotion of socially oriented values. Strengthening students' sense of meaning, trust, and moral commitment may help mitigate anomie and its negative consequences.

Furthermore, the role of social environments, especially digital contexts, should be considered in designing interventions, as these environments can influence both value formation and experiences of alienation.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the included studies were conducted across diverse cultural contexts, which may limit generalizability of the findings due to differences in social environments and value systems. Second, variations in the measurement and conceptualization of anomie across studies may affect the comparability of findings.

In addition, publication bias cannot be completely ruled out because studies reporting significant or theoretically meaningful findings are more likely to be published and indexed in major academic databases, while grey literature may not have been fully captured. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted with appropriate caution.

Furthermore, the overall certainty of the synthesized evidence may be influenced by differences in research design, cultural context, and measurement approaches across the

included studies. Although recurring themes were consistently identified across the literature, the findings should be interpreted in light of these methodological variations.

Future research should further examine how cultural values shape the manifestation of anomie and explore longitudinal approaches to better understand its developmental dynamics. Additionally, future studies may investigate the interaction among different dimensions of anomie and their combined effects on behavior and well-being.

Conclusion

This study provides a systematic and value-oriented synthesis of the dimensions of anomie among university students by integrating evidence from 33 empirical studies. First, in response to RQ1, the findings identify four core dimensions of anomie: meaninglessness and distrust, powerlessness, moral decline, and fetishism of money. These dimensions demonstrate that anomie is a multidimensional construct encompassing cognitive, psychological, behavioral, and value-related components. Second, addressing RQ2, the study shows that diverse conceptualizations of anomie—ranging from alienation and social cynicism to strain and deviance—can be systematically integrated into a coherent multidimensional framework. This synthesis resolves fragmentation in the literature and provides greater conceptual clarity. Third, in response to RQ3, the findings reveal that these dimensions can be meaningfully interpreted from a value-oriented perspective. Anomie is not merely a structural condition but reflects value disorientation, including the breakdown of shared norms, the erosion of moral commitments, and the imbalance between self-enhancing and socially oriented values (Konty, 2005).

Finally, addressing RQ4, the study highlights the central role of values in shaping both the development and consequences of anomie. The dominance of self-enhancing values is associated with higher levels of anomie, whereas socially oriented values may mitigate its effects. Moreover, value-based interventions, such as moral and civic education, demonstrate the potential to reduce anomie and promote ethical behavior.

Overall, this study advances the literature by providing a coherent and value-oriented framework for understanding anomie among university students. By integrating fragmented findings into a unified model, it contributes to both theoretical development and practical application. The results underscore the importance of value systems in higher education and provide a foundation for future research on the mechanisms and regulation of anomie.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Data Availability Statement

All data extracted and analysed during this review are included within the article.

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