



Research Paper

Elementary School Teachers' Lived Experiences of the Educational Challenges Faced by Single-Parent Students



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Abstract

The present study aimed to explore the lived experiences of elementary school teachers in District 2 of Ardabil County regarding the educational challenges faced by single-parent students. A qualitative approach and descriptive phenomenological method were employed. The study population consisted of elementary school teachers (Grades 1–6) who had teaching experience with single-parent students. Participants were selected based on the principle of theoretical saturation. Data collection reached theoretical saturation after 17 in-depth, semi-structured interviews, and the data were analyzed using the Colaizzi method. The findings indicated that the educational challenges experienced by single-parent students emerged across various dimensions, including emotional, behavioral, academic, and social domains. In the emotional domain, feelings of insecurity, lack of affection, anxiety, and emotional dependence on teachers were identified as major concerns. In the behavioral domain, aggression, emotional fluctuations, attention-seeking through undesirable behaviors, and poor self-control were observed. In the academic domain, reduced motivation, decreased concentration, difficulties in following up on assignments, and instability in academic performance were among the most prominent challenges. In the social domain, difficulties such as social withdrawal, limited ability to establish relationships with peers, and restricted participation in group activities were reported. The findings further indicated that family-related factors, particularly the psychological and economic pressures experienced by the custodial parent and the extent of family cooperation with the school, played a determining role in exacerbating or alleviating these challenges. Based on the findings, adopting supportive educational approaches, creating a safe classroom environment, strengthening effective home–school interactions, and utilizing counseling resources may contribute to reducing educational challenges and promoting the comprehensive development of single-parent students.

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Introduction

The family, as the primary social institution and the most important educational environment, plays a fundamental role in shaping children's personality, behavior, and psychological development. However, demographic and economic changes in various societies have contributed to the growing prevalence of single-parent families as a social phenomenon, thereby creating new challenges in childrearing and, consequently, making teachers' roles and responsibilities in schools increasingly complex and sensitive (*Um & Mincy, 2025*). Students from single-parent families face a range of specific needs and difficulties due to the absence of one parent and their particular psychological, social, and economic circumstances. Therefore, developing a deep understanding of these issues is essential for teachers. Challenges such as insufficient emotional support, psychological pressures, family economic difficulties, behavioral problems, and, in some cases, the ineffective presence of parents are among the factors that may affect these students' learning processes and social development. This situation has required teachers, in addition to their instructional responsibilities, to assume a key role in providing emotional, psychological, and social support to these students and to employ appropriate educational strategies to address their difficulties (*Herke, 2025*).

Teachers' lived experiences, as individuals who interact directly with these students, constitute a rich and valuable source for gaining a more accurate and realistic understanding of the educational challenges

and needs of students from single-parent families. These experiences not only contribute to identifying existing problems and barriers but can also provide a basis for developing practical and strategic approaches to improving the teaching and learning process and enhancing the quality of education. The present study aimed to conduct an in-depth analysis of these experiences by elucidating the various dimensions of educational challenges, examining teachers' strategies, and exploring their effective role in supporting these students (*StEvens, 2024*).

Given the importance of schools and teachers in shaping students' mental health and academic success, particularly under the sensitive circumstances associated with single-parent families, this study can serve as a bridge between educational theories and approaches and the realities of educational practice. In doing so, it may contribute to improving educational policies and planning and strengthening teachers' professional skills. Furthermore, the findings of this study may play a role in developing specialized teacher training programs, strengthening family-school collaboration, and providing effective social support. Ultimately, this research represents an important and meaningful step toward achieving the objectives of the education system and enhancing the quality of life of students from single-parent families.

Research Method

The present study was conducted with an applied purpose within a qualitative research

framework using a descriptive phenomenological approach. This methodological choice was based on the nature of the research topic and the need to develop a deep and comprehensive understanding of teachers' lived experiences in dealing with the educational challenges faced by students from single-parent families. In this approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews and carefully analyzed using Colaizzi's method to identify the main patterns and themes emerging from the participants' lived experiences. Accordingly, the integration of a qualitative approach with descriptive phenomenology, together with particular attention to contextual factors, provided an appropriate framework for gaining an in-depth and accurate understanding of the educational challenges faced by single-parent students and the ways in which teachers respond to these challenges. The participants consisted of all elementary school teachers teaching Grades 1 through 6 in urban schools located in District 2 of Ardabil, with a total population of 370 teachers. Given the diversity of their professional experiences, educational backgrounds, and direct interactions with students under different circumstances, these teachers represented a rich and appropriate source of information for data collection. To determine the sample size in this qualitative study, criterion-based purposive sampling was employed, and 17 participants were selected. Participants were selected based on the extent of their experience and direct encounters with single-parent students, and the sampling process continued until theoretical saturation was

achieved. The primary data collection instrument was an in-depth, semi-structured interview, which enabled the researcher to collect teachers' lived experiences comprehensively and accurately through a highly flexible and interactive process. The researcher's initial task involved carefully and thoroughly reading all descriptions and accounts provided by the teachers concerning the educational challenges faced by single-parent students. At this stage, the researcher employed Colaizzi's seven-step descriptive method to analyze the data systematically and in depth. The first step involved extracting words and sentences related to the central concept of the study. The researcher carefully reviewed the interview transcripts and identified all statements, words, and sentences relevant to the educational challenges faced by single-parent students in order to establish the foundation for subsequent analysis. This process was undertaken to accurately identify the key elements and fundamental concepts underlying the participants' experiences. In the second step, a specific and precise meaning was formulated for each significant and key statement identified in the previous stage. The researcher carefully examined the meaning of each statement and sought to transform it into a meaningful, discrete concept or code representing a particular aspect of the teachers' experiences or perspectives. This process contributed to greater clarity and more precise categorization of the data. In the third step, the researcher reread all participants' descriptions and organized the formulated meanings into specific thematic categories related to the

educational challenges faced by single-parent students. These categories facilitated the development of a coherent and systematic structure for the data and enabled the researcher to identify patterns and relationships among the concepts more effectively. The fourth step involved rereading the formulated meanings and conducting an in-depth analysis of the data. At this stage, the researcher identified and specified two major themes or core codes representing the educational challenges faced by single-parent students. These themes emerged through the integration and convergence of the concepts and patterns identified in the data and were subsequently used as the principal indicators for the final analysis. In the fifth step, the researcher integrated all the inferred perspectives into a comprehensive and exhaustive description of the phenomenon. This description encompassed all relevant details and dimensions of the phenomenon under investigation and sought to coherently and accurately reflect the various aspects of the educational challenges faced by single-parent students, as well as the ways in which teachers encountered and responded to these challenges. In the sixth step, following the development of the comprehensive description, the researcher presented a concise statement of the fundamental structure of the phenomenon, representing its essential nature and the most important findings. This summary articulated the core characteristics and nature of the identified challenges in a concise yet accurate manner.

Finally, in the seventh step, the findings were returned to the research participants so that they could clarify their perspectives and views regarding the results and confirm or modify the accuracy and credibility of the interpretations. This member-checking process enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of the study and ensured that the researcher's interpretations accurately represented the teachers' actual experiences. To ensure the validity of the research findings, content and face validity were established through consultation with faculty members and experts in educational sciences and research methodology. For this purpose, the processes of code extraction, thematic categorization, and data interpretation were reviewed by several professors and experts to assess the content relevance, conceptual clarity, internal coherence, and consistency of the identified themes with the interview data.

Research Findings

This section presents the results of the analysis of the qualitative data collected through interviews with the participating teachers. To gain an in-depth understanding of teachers' lived experiences in dealing with the educational challenges faced by single-parent students, the interview transcripts were examined and analyzed line by line. This process resulted in the identification of 257 initial meaning units, each of which reflected an aspect of teachers' perceptions, responses, and educational practices.

- Initial Coding (Subcategories)

Table 1. An Example of the Formation of Subcategories

Interview Excerpts	Subcategories
“Every year, we usually have some students in our class, and one or two of them have either lost a parent or are living in a single-parent family.”	1. Single-parent students in the classroom
“Either they have lost a parent or their parents are divorced, and in some way, they have only one parent.”	2. Different single-parent family circumstances
“Last year, I also had a student who had lost his father. This year, I have a student whose parents are divorced.”	2. Different single-parent family circumstances
“Before this happened, the student was very energetic and active in the classroom. But after this event, he became completely distressed, both emotionally and academically.”	3. Behavioral changes following the loss of a parent

Table 2. List of Subcategories Extracted from the Data

No.	Subcategory	No.	Subcategory
1	Single-parent students in the classroom	128	Reduced sense of uniqueness
2	Different single-parent family circumstances (parental death/divorce)	129	Increased knowledge and reading
3	Behavioral changes following the loss of a parent	130	Concealment of family circumstances
4	Academic decline following a family crisis	131	Desire to keep family matters confidential
5	Feelings of hopelessness and psychological instability	132	Positive relationships with peers
6	Social withdrawal and social isolation	133	Normal behavior at school
7	Feelings of deprivation and inferiority	134	Emotional problems arising from family circumstances
8	Blaming oneself for parental divorce or loss	135	Need for greater educational and emotional support
9	Feelings of insecurity and fear of the future	136	Sensitivity to criticism and emotional vulnerability
10	Manifestation of aggression and anger	137	Increased emotional sensitivity in higher grades
11	Social withdrawal and reduced academic motivation	138	Anger and behavioral instability during group work
12	Assigning responsibilities to increase participation	139	Early fatigue and reduced effort in problem-solving
13	Indirect intervention to prevent feelings of pity	140	Social isolation and withdrawal
14	Use of peer support	141	Difficulty expressing emotions and opinions
15	Activities and play to overcome isolation	142	Use of a gentle tone when giving reminders
16	Use of the school counselor	143	Providing opportunities for self-expression and self-advocacy
17	Effectiveness of combining supportive strategies	144	Flexibility in responding to sensitive behaviors
18	Emotional deprivation	145	Creating a safe environment for expressing emotions and opinions
19	Inconsistent behaviors	146	Increased supervision and support during group work
20	Decline in concentration	147	Guiding students toward problem-solving in conflict situations
21	Academic decline	148	Helping students overcome fatigue and give up less readily
22	Social difficulties	149	Opening new avenues for dealing with problems
23	Problematic behaviors	150	Need for greater attention and approval-seeking
24	Supportive relationship	151	Low tolerance for frustration and criticism
25	Positive reinforcement	152	Sensitivity and rapid discouragement
26	Supportive collaboration	153	Intense emotional reactions
27	Safe environment	154	Social isolation and weak communication skills

28	Balance between affection and discipline	155	Desire for closeness with peers
29	Patience and dialogue	156	Creating a safe environment
30	Supportive relationship	157	Appropriate encouragement
31	Individual differences	158	Clearly communicating expectations
32	Enhancing self-esteem	159	Non-discriminatory attention
33	Supportive collaboration	160	Reinforcing small achievements
34	Social modeling	161	Teaching pride in achievement
35	Balance between affection and discipline	162	Opportunities for decision-making
36	Empathetic environment	163	Assigning small responsibilities
37	Significant deficiencies	164	Differences in responses based on the type of absent parent
38	Aggression	165	Emotional isolation in the absence of the mother
39	Weakness in group work	166	Irregular classroom attendance
40	Low self-esteem and self-confidence	167	Challenges in learning and studying
41	Social isolation	168	Supportive dialogue with the student
42	Academic decline and lack of motivation	169	Reminding students of tasks and expectations
43	Attention and care	170	Non-discrimination in assignments
44	Increased group work	171	Preventing opportunities for reduced effort
45	Strengthening social relationships and self-esteem	172	Communication and cooperation with parents
46	Family assistance	173	Problems faced by single-parent children
47	Avoiding comparisons and encouraging abilities	174	High prevalence of single-parent students
48	Parental influence on upbringing	175	Living with one parent following divorce
49	Parental absence and adverse effects	176	Harmful consequences of divorce
50	Cognitive imbalance	177	Psychological and academic problems
51	Disruption in the expression of emotions and feelings	178	Feelings of helplessness
52	Family and child distress	179	Need for early identification
53	Manifestation of effects at school and in society	180	Assessment of psychological and emotional status
54	Weak supervision and reduced parental support	181	Reporting to the principal and counselor
55	Lack of interest and non-participation in lessons	182	Need for special attention
56	Academic decline	183	Support from the school and peers
57	Teacher's prior preparation and awareness	184	Presence of a family counselor
58	Reviewing the student's file	185	Need for continuous monitoring
59	Appropriate treatment and creating a sense of security	186	Unstable emotions
60	Meeting with parents and counseling	187	Emotional fluctuations
61	Participation in group activities	188	Emotional void
62	Strengthening self-confidence and providing constructive feedback	189	Lack of academic support
63	Lack of self-confidence	190	Incomplete assignments
64	Causes of low self-esteem	191	Absence of a parent to provide academic assistance
65	Sensitivity to criticism and distress	192	Reduced academic progress
66	Weakness in group work	193	Low self-confidence
67	Identifying causes and decision-making	194	Inferiority and comparison with others
68	Attention to and communication with the student	195	Strong dependence on the teacher
69	Game-based teaching and increased participation	196	Excessive independence or defiance
70	Developed dependence	197	Behavioral, academic, and social challenges
71	Lack of emotional support	198	Need to create a safe classroom environment
72	Reduced motivation and concentration	199	Establishing a warm and secure relationship
73	Stress and anxiety	200	Creating a trustworthy space for communication
74	Caution and reduced participation	201	Emotional support for the student

75	Increased teacher follow-up	202	Flexibility in academic matters
76	Teacher's special attention	203	Providing another opportunity to complete assignments
77	Creating a safe environment	204	Assistance with completing assignments at school
78	Close relationship and active listening	205	Involving the family in the support process
79	Enhancing self-esteem	206	Coordination between home and school
80	Adapting teaching methods	207	Strengthening students' self-confidence
81	Communication with the family	208	Encouraging small efforts
82	Additional counseling and support	209	Helping students believe in their abilities
83	Special educational and emotional attention	210	Supportive and hopeful messages
84	Family problems	211	Creating a calm and non-judgmental environment
85	Warm and supportive communication	212	Emphasizing the understanding of individual differences
86	Behavioral and psychological problems	213	Feelings of insecurity and emotional instability
87	Drowsiness	214	Emotional fluctuations in the classroom
88	Academic decline	215	Concentration difficulties and distractibility
89	Isolation and weak communication	216	Mental preoccupation with problems at home
90	Lack of self-confidence	217	Disorganization in academic activities
91	Strengthening hope and motivation	218	Inability to complete assignments and forgetfulness
92	Warm relationship and compensation for lack of affection	219	Lack of academic support at home
93	Providing suggestions and recreational activities	220	Social withdrawal and difficulty with social interaction
94	Coordination with parents	221	Aggression and emotional sensitivity
95	Academic follow-up and personal activities	222	Creating a safe and supportive environment
96	Developing self-confidence	223	Strengthening the sense of being heard and self-confidence
97	Lack of emotional support	224	Step-by-step assistance with lessons
98	Feelings of loneliness	225	Planning to compensate for academic lag
99	Low self-confidence	226	Maintaining communication with parents
100	Lack of a sense of support	227	Providing educational strategies to the family
101	Psychological pressure	228	Attention to and praise for small achievements
102	Reduced academic concentration	229	Creating a non-judgmental classroom environment
103	Intense emotional reaction	230	Preventing emotional withdrawal
104	Sensitivity and hopelessness	231	Emotional instability
105	Premature anger	232	Fluctuations in concentration and attention
106	Reduced motivation and enthusiasm	233	Feelings of loneliness and lack of support
107	Lack of group participation	234	Failure to complete assignments due to lack of support
108	Disorganization in completing assignments	235	Ambivalence in social behavior
109	Persistent mental preoccupation	236	Seeking attention or security through behavior
110	Low participation in artistic activities	237	Importance of recognizing the student's individual response
111	Creating an emotionally safe environment	238	Making educational tasks manageable and monitorable
112	Use of the school counselor	239	Identifying difficult areas in lessons and assignments
113	Increasing instructional time	240	Breaking tasks into smaller steps
114	Attention to psychological pressure	241	Establishing a consistent and predictable classroom routine

115	Supportive grouping	242	Providing brief and precise feedback
116	Awareness of living conditions	243	Coordination with the caregiver regarding home-related problems
117	Cooperation with the single parent	244	Need for attention and support
118	Increased classroom participation	245	Lack of academic support
119	Family tension	246	Social withdrawal
120	Severe sensitivity	247	Aggression and social sensitivity
121	Strong dependence on the teacher	248	Initial dialogue to identify the problem
122	Sensitivity to teacher attention	249	Identifying the source of the behavior
123	Feelings of comparison and lack of affection	250	Adapting teaching methods to individual circumstances
124	Seeking emotional compensation from the teacher	251	Reducing learning pressure
125	Positive teacher modeling	252	Increasing cognitive engagement
126	Emotional understanding and empathy	253	Teacher behavioral consistency
127	Increased social participation	254	Targeted communication with the family

- **Overarching Theme: Educational Challenges Faced by Single-Parent Students**

In the process of analyzing the qualitative data in this study, and based on the step-by-step implementation of the systematic analysis procedure, 254 initial codes were first extracted from the in-depth interviews conducted with teachers. These codes reflected a diverse range of teachers’ lived experiences, perceptions, concerns, and observations regarding the educational challenges faced by single-parent students. During the refinement and integration of the codes, the data were repeatedly reviewed, the codes were continuously compared with one another, and conceptual overlaps were eliminated. Codes that were similar or closely related in meaning were subsequently merged while preserving their original content. Through this process, and without eliminating the underlying concepts, the number of initial codes was reduced to 228 subcategories, each representing a specific and distinct aspect of

teachers’ educational experiences in dealing with single-parent students. In the subsequent step, the subcategories were organized into seven main categories based on conceptual similarities, recurring patterns, and semantic relationships. Finally, through the integration and conceptual abstraction of the main categories, an overarching theme entitled “Educational Challenges Faced by Single-Parent Students” was identified. This overarching theme, serving as the central core of the findings, represents the overall nature of teachers’ lived experiences in this context. The overarching theme indicates that the educational challenges faced by single-parent students constitute a multidimensional and complex phenomenon that is influenced by the simultaneous interaction of individual, family, school, and social factors. Addressing these challenges therefore requires flexible, supportive, and informed educational approaches at both the school and broader educational-system levels.

Table 3. An Overview of the Overarching Theme: Educational Challenges Faced by Single-Parent Students

No.	Subcategories	Main Categories	Overarching Theme
1	Single-parent students in the classroom	Characteristics and Circumstances of Single-Parent Students	Educational Challenges Faced by Single-Parent Students
2	Different single-parent family circumstances (parental death/divorce)		
3	Behavioral changes following the loss of a parent		
4	Individual differences		
5	Significant deficiencies		
6	Cognitive imbalance		
7	Family and child distress		
8	Developed dependence		
9	Family problems		
10	Reduced sense of uniqueness		
11	Increased knowledge and reading		
12	Concealment of family circumstances		
13	Desire to keep family matters confidential		
14	Problems faced by single-parent children		
15	High prevalence of single-parent students		
16	Living with one parent following divorce		
17	Harmful consequences of divorce		
18	Strong dependence on the teacher		
19	Feelings of loneliness and lack of support		
20	Ambivalence in social behavior		
21	Academic decline following a family crisis	Academic and Behavioral Challenges	
22	Decline in concentration		
23	Lack of motivation		
24	Lack of interest and non-participation in lessons		
25	Reduced motivation and concentration		
26	Drowsiness		
27	Academic follow-up and personal activities		
28	Social difficulties		
29	Caution and reduced participation		
30	Participation in group activities		
31	Psychological pressure		
32	Reduced academic concentration		
33	Lack of group participation		
34	Disorganization in completing assignments		
35	Persistent mental preoccupation		
36	Low participation in artistic activities		
37	Increasing instructional time		

38	Increased classroom participation		
39	Early fatigue and reduced effort in problem-solving		
40	Irregular classroom attendance		
41	Challenges in learning and studying		
42	Reminding students of tasks and expectations		
43	Preventing opportunities for reduced effort		
44	Incomplete assignments		
45	Absence of a parent to provide academic assistance		
46	Reduced academic progress		
47	Flexibility in academic matters		
48	Providing another opportunity to complete assignments		
49	Assistance with completing assignments at school		
50	Concentration difficulties and distractibility		
51	Mental preoccupation with problems at home		
52	Disorganization in academic activities		
53	Inability to complete assignments and forgetfulness		
54	Lack of academic support at home		
55	Failure to complete assignments due to lack of support		
56	Making educational tasks manageable and monitorable	Emotional and Affective Challenges	
57	Identifying difficult areas in lessons and assignments		
58	Feelings of hopelessness and psychological instability		
59	Feelings of deprivation and inferiority		
60	Blaming oneself for parental divorce or loss		
61	Feelings of insecurity and fear of the future		
62	Emotional deprivation		
63	Lack of self-esteem		
64	Disruption in the expression of emotions and feelings		
65	Lack of self-confidence		
66	Sensitivity to criticism and distress		
67	Lack of emotional support		
68	Stress and anxiety		
69	Feelings of loneliness		
70	Lack of a sense of support		
71	Developed dependence		
72	Warm relationship and compensation for lack of affection		

73	Providing suggestions and recreational activities	Communication and Social Challenges	
74	Supportive relationship		
75	Close relationship and active listening		
76	Intense emotional reaction		
77	Sensitivity and hopelessness		
78	Premature anger		
79	Reduced motivation and enthusiasm		
80	Awareness of living conditions		
81	Family tension		
82	Severe sensitivity		
83	Strong dependence on the teacher		
84	Sensitivity to teacher attention		
85	Feelings of comparison and lack of affection		
86	Seeking emotional compensation from the teacher		
87	Emotional understanding and empathy		
88	Sensitivity to criticism and emotional vulnerability		
89	Increased emotional sensitivity in higher grades		
90	Anger and behavioral instability during group work		
91	Social withdrawal and social isolation		
92	Difficulty expressing emotions and opinions		
93	Flexibility in responding to sensitive behaviors		
94	Creating a safe environment for expressing emotions and opinions		
95	Need for greater attention and approval-seeking		
96	Low tolerance for frustration and criticism		
97	Sensitivity and rapid discouragement		
98	Emotional isolation in the absence of the mother		
99	Feelings of helplessness		
100	Unstable emotions		
101	Emotional fluctuations		
102	Emotional void		
103	Emotional support for the student		
104	Supportive and hopeful messages		
105	Feelings of insecurity and emotional instability		
106	Emotional fluctuations in the classroom		
107	Emotional instability		
108	Preventing emotional withdrawal		
109	Social withdrawal and social isolation		
110	Use of peer support		

111	Activities and play to overcome isolation		
112	Social modeling		
113	Weakness in group work		
114	Social isolation		
115	Increased group work		
116	Strengthening social relationships and self-esteem		
117	Participation in group activities		
118	Warm and supportive communication		
119	Isolation and weak communication		
120	Assigning responsibilities to increase participation		
121	Indirect intervention to prevent feelings of pity		
122	Positive relationships with peers		
123	Normal behavior at school		
124	Increased social participation		
125	Desire for closeness with peers		
126	Supportive grouping		
127	Use of a gentle tone when giving reminders		
128	Providing opportunities for self-expression and self-advocacy		
129	Appropriate encouragement		
130	Clearly communicating expectations		
131	Non-discriminatory attention		
132	Social withdrawal and difficulty with social interaction		
133	Creating a safe and supportive environment		
134	Strengthening the sense of being heard and self-confidence		
135	Importance of recognizing the student's individual response		
136	Initial dialogue to identify the problem		
137	Identifying the source of the behavior		
138	Manifestation of aggression and anger	Adaptive and Behavioral Challenges	
139	Inconsistent behaviors		
140	Problematic behaviors		
141	Aggression		
142	Behavioral and psychological problems		
143	Aggression and emotional sensitivity		
144	Inferiority and comparison with others		
145	Excessive independence or defiance		
146	Behavioral, academic, and social challenges		
147	Aggression and emotional sensitivity		
148	Aggression and social sensitivity		

149	Seeking attention or security through behavior		
150	Family assistance		
151	Avoiding comparisons and encouraging abilities		
152	Parental influence on upbringing		
153	Parental absence and adverse effects		
154	Weak supervision and reduced parental support		
155	Coordination with parents		
156	Communication with the family		
157	Cooperation with the single parent		
158	Differences in responses based on the type of absent parent		
159	Communication and cooperation with parents		
160	Need for early identification		
161	Assessment of psychological and emotional status		
162	—		
163	Involving the family in the support process		
164	Coordination between home and school		
165	Maintaining communication with parents		
166	Providing educational strategies to the family		
167	Coordination with the caregiver regarding home-related problems		
168	Teacher's prior preparation and awareness		
169	Reviewing the student's file		
170	Appropriate treatment and creating a sense of security		
171	Meeting with parents and counseling		
172	Identifying causes and decision-making		
173	Attention to and communication with the student		
174	Game-based teaching and increased participation		
175	Increased teacher follow-up		
176	Teacher's special attention		
177	Creating a safe environment		
178	Adapting teaching methods		
179	Additional counseling and support		
180	Special educational and emotional attention		
181	Use of the school counselor		
182	Effectiveness of combining supportive strategies		
183	Providing suggestions and recreational activities		

Family Support Challenges

Teacher Support and Guidance Challenges

184	Creating an emotionally safe environment		
185	Use of the school counselor		
186	Positive teacher modeling		
187	Guiding students toward problem-solving in conflict situations		
188	Helping students overcome fatigue and give up less readily		
189	Opening new avenues for dealing with problems		
190	Need to create a safe classroom environment		
191	Establishing a warm and secure relationship		
192	Creating a trustworthy space for communication		
193	Supportive dialogue with the student		
194	Attention to and praise for small achievements		
195	Teaching pride in achievement		
196	Opportunities for decision-making		
197	Assigning small responsibilities		
198	Need for special attention		
199	Creating a calm and non-judgmental environment		
200	Emphasizing the understanding of individual differences		
201	Creating a non-judgmental classroom environment		
202	Need for attention and support		
203	Adapting teaching methods to individual circumstances		
204	Reducing learning pressure		
205	Increasing cognitive engagement		
206	Teacher behavioral consistency		
207	Targeted communication with the family		
208	Positive reinforcement		
209	Supportive collaboration		
210	Safe environment		
211	Balance between affection and discipline		
212	Patience and dialogue		
213	Enhancing self-esteem		
214	Empathetic environment		
215	Attention and care		
216	Strengthening self-confidence and providing constructive feedback		
217	Strengthening hope and motivation		
218	Developing self-confidence		
219	Reinforcing small achievements		
220	Strengthening students' self-confidence		
221	Encouraging small efforts		

222	Helping students believe in their abilities		
223	Planning to compensate for academic lag		
224	Attention to and praise for small achievements		
225	Establishing a consistent and predictable classroom routine		
226	Providing brief and precise feedback		
227	Breaking tasks into smaller steps		
228	Step-by-step assistance with lessons		

Discussion and Conclusion

What Are the Educational Challenges of Single-Parent Students Based on the Lived Experiences of Primary School Teachers in District Two of Ardabil County?

Based on the data collected from the lived experiences of first-cycle primary school teachers in District One of Ardabil County, the findings of the study indicate that students from single-parent families face a broad and complex range of educational challenges that can be categorized into academic, behavioral, emotional, social, and support-related domains. Through their direct experiences and interactions with these students, teachers emphasized the distinctive characteristics and circumstances of this group, including the high prevalence of single-parent students within classrooms; different forms of single-parent status, such as parental death or divorce; behavioral changes following the loss of a parent; individual differences; significant deficiencies and cognitive imbalance; family disruption and the dependency that may develop as a result; family-related problems; a diminished sense of uniqueness and belonging; and a tendency to conceal their family circumstances. These

characteristics highlight the substantial need for targeted educational attention and intervention and contribute to diverse challenges in students’ learning and social development. In the academic and behavioral domains, teachers reported that single-parent students experienced academic decline, reduced concentration, lack of motivation, limited participation in lessons and group activities, psychological distress, and early fatigue as a result of family crises. These conditions contributed to disorganization in completing assignments, persistent mental preoccupation, reduced academic progress, and difficulties in following through with educational responsibilities. These findings underscore the necessity for teachers to pay particular attention to instructional strategies and to provide continuous monitoring and follow-up in the classroom. From an emotional and affective perspective, single-parent students experienced feelings of hopelessness, emotional deprivation, low self-esteem, strong dependence on teachers, stress, anxiety, and emotional instability. Teachers noted that, due to insufficient parental support and emotional gaps, these students were vulnerable to emotional fluctuations, heightened sensitivity, feelings

of loneliness, and a persistent need for attention and approval. These challenges may lead to difficulties in expressing emotions, anger, intense emotional reactions, and inconsistent or contradictory behaviors. Regarding communication and social interactions, the findings indicated that single-parent students were often characterized by social withdrawal and difficulties in communicating with peers. Teachers stated that these students required peer support, the establishment of a safe environment, opportunities for self-expression, social modeling, and group activities to facilitate social participation and enhance self-confidence. Positive interactions and assigning responsibilities to these students within the school environment may contribute to strengthening their social skills and reducing social isolation. The findings also showed that aggression, problematic behaviors, and emotional sensitivity constituted some of the adaptive and functional challenges experienced by these students. Some students may resort to aggressive behaviors or excessive independence as a means of gaining attention or achieving psychological security. Managing such behaviors requires careful measures as well as specific supportive and educational approaches. Finally, the roles of the family and teacher as important sources of support were highlighted in this study. Teachers reported that interaction and cooperation with parents, identification of students' emotional and educational conditions, creation of a safe environment, provision of special academic and educational attention, constructive feedback, and

continuous encouragement could have substantial positive effects in reducing challenges and improving the academic and emotional functioning of single-parent students. The integration of family support, teacher guidance, and the creation of a safe and predictable classroom environment was emphasized as a key strategy for addressing educational difficulties and strengthening the capacities of these students. Overall, the findings of the study demonstrated that the educational challenges faced by single-parent students are complex, multidimensional, and interrelated. Addressing these challenges requires the simultaneous implementation of educational, supportive, and psychological strategies by teachers, together with active family involvement. These findings provide an appropriate basis for developing practical recommendations and educational policies aimed at improving the educational and academic conditions of single-parent students.

The findings of the present study regarding the educational challenges faced by single-parent students are substantially consistent with those reported in numerous domestic and international studies. The results indicated that single-parent students encounter multiple academic, behavioral, emotional, and social difficulties, while teachers play a key role in providing support to these students. These findings are consistent with the study by [Naghizadeh et al. \(2023\)](#), which reported that single-parent students experience a lack of emotional support, behavioral problems, and academic decline, and that teachers play a vital role in supporting them. Similarly, the

findings of the present study are in agreement with those of *Alishah and Khanarinejad (2023)*, who found that single-parent students often experience greater academic difficulties due to insufficient family support. This consistency particularly underscores the importance of teacher intervention in compensating for gaps in educational and supportive resources. The findings of the present study likewise emphasize that these students require direct teacher guidance and support to reduce social isolation and strengthen their communication skills. The consistency of the present findings with international research is also noteworthy. *Ernawatiy (2024)* and *Johnson (2024)* demonstrated that children from single-parent families face academic, emotional, and psychological challenges and that parental involvement and school-based support can mitigate the negative effects of these challenges. This finding is fully consistent with the results of the present study regarding the critical role of teachers and the importance of creating a safe and supportive environment. *Jayatillake et al. (2023)*, *Bago (2022)*, and *Lamb (2012)* also found that single-parent students experience greater academic and behavioral difficulties due to insufficient family support and that their academic performance requires intervention and support from schools and teachers. This finding is directly consistent with the results of the present study.

The findings of the present study indicated that single-parent students face broad and multidimensional academic, behavioral, emotional, and social challenges, and that

teachers play a critical role in mitigating the effects of these challenges and providing support to these students. These findings can be scientifically explained and justified through educational theories, developmental psychology, and social science frameworks. From the perspective of developmental psychology and Maslow's hierarchy of basic needs, single-parent students may experience emotional and social deficiencies due to the absence of continuous support from one of their parents. The needs for security, belonging, and a sense of worth, which are typically fulfilled within the family environment, may be less adequately met among these students. Consequently, they may exhibit difficulties such as social withdrawal, emotional instability, and dependence on teachers at school and in their social interactions. The findings of the present study, particularly those concerning strong dependence on teachers, perceived lack of support, and emotional fluctuations, are consistent with this theoretical framework and highlight the role of teachers as temporary providers of students' emotional and social needs. According to Bandura's social learning theory, students' behaviors and social skills develop through observation and interaction with important behavioral models, such as teachers and peers. Therefore, positive teacher modeling and the establishment of a safe and supportive environment can reduce problematic and socially withdrawn behaviors among single-parent students and strengthen their social skills. The findings of the present study concerning the use of social modeling, the creation of a safe environment, and the

promotion of students' group participation are consistent with this theory and indicate that active teacher intervention in the classroom can help compensate for some of the negative consequences associated with parental absence. From the perspective of family systems theory and the family-school interaction framework, students' behavior and academic functioning are influenced by the interaction between the family and school environments. Single-parent families may have fewer resources for providing continuous support and monitoring children due to the absence of one parent. Under such circumstances, the school and teacher may function as components of an alternative support system. The findings of the present study, including the need for coordination between teachers and the parent or caregiver, the provision of educational and emotional support, and attention to individual differences, are consistent with family systems theory and demonstrate the importance of the school environment in mitigating the negative effects of adverse family circumstances. From the perspective of educational psychology and motivational theory, insufficient family support and emotional difficulties may result in lack of motivation, academic decline, and reduced student engagement. The present study demonstrated that providing individualized and group-based support, creating a safe environment, offering special educational attention, and reinforcing students' small achievements can enhance the motivation and self-confidence of single-parent students and improve their learning processes. These findings are consistent with motivational

theories, particularly models based on self-efficacy and self-confidence. Overall, the findings of the present study can be scientifically and theoretically explained through the integration of developmental psychology, social learning, family systems, and motivational psychology theories. These frameworks suggest that the educational challenges experienced by single-parent students are not solely a product of family circumstances; rather, their negative effects can be mitigated through school-based interventions, teachers' emotional and educational support, and the establishment of a safe and participatory environment. This theoretical explanation further underscores the need to design supportive, educational, and counseling programs for teachers and schools so that they can effectively fulfill their supportive roles and reduce the negative consequences associated with single-parent family structures.

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