

**BỘ GIÁO DỤC VÀ ĐÀO TẠO**  
**TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC QUẢN LÝ VÀ CÔNG NGHỆ HẢI PHÒNG**

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**KHÓA LUẬN TỐT NGHIỆP**  
**CHUYÊN NGÀNH: NGÔN NGỮ ANH TRUNG**

**Sinh viên : Phạm Thị Thanh Xuân**

**HẢI PHÒNG – 2025**

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TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC QUẢN LÝ VÀ CÔNG NGHỆ HẢI PHÒNG

**A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF FAMILY AND  
KINSHIP IDIOMS IN ENGLISH AND CHINESE: AN  
ANALYSIS OF 50 COMMON IDIOMS**

**KHÓA LUẬN TỐT NGHIỆP ĐẠI HỌC HỆ CHÍNH QUY  
CHUYÊN NGÀNH: NGÔN NGỮ ANH TRUNG**

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**Giảng viên hướng dẫn: Th.s Bùi Thị Mai Anh**

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Tên đề tài: A comparative study of family and kinship idioms in English and  
Chinese: An analysis of 50 common idioms

# NHIỆM VỤ ĐỀ TÀI

## 1. Nội dung và các yêu cầu cần giải quyết trong nhiệm vụ đề tài tốt nghiệp

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## 2. Các tài liệu, số liệu cần thiết

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## 3. Địa điểm thực tập tốt nghiệp

Trung tâm ngoại ngữ Trác Việt

## GIẢNG VIÊN HƯỚNG DẪN ĐỀ TÀI TỐT NGHIỆP

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**Nội dung hướng dẫn:** A comparative study of family and kinship idioms in English and Chinese: An analysis of 50 common idioms.

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Đã nhận nhiệm vụ ĐTTN

*Sinh viên*

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*Giảng viên hướng dẫn*

**Phạm Thị Thanh Xuân**

**Bùi Thị Mai Anh**

*Hải Phòng, ngày 27 tháng 12 năm 2025*

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Độc lập - Tự do - Hạnh phúc

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1. Tinh thần thái độ của sinh viên trong quá trình làm đề tài tốt nghiệp

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3. Ý kiến của giảng viên hướng dẫn tốt nghiệp

Được bảo vệ  Không được bảo vệ  Điểm hướng dẫn

Hải Phòng, ngày 27 tháng 12 năm 2025

Giảng viên hướng dẫn

(Ký và ghi rõ họ tên)

Bùi Thị Mai Anh

CỘNG HÒA XÃ HỘI CHỦ NGHĨA VIỆT NAM

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Họ và tên giảng viên: .....  
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Họ và tên sinh viên: Phạm Thị Thanh Xuân  
Chuyên ngành: Ngôn ngữ Anh Trung  
Nội dung hướng dẫn: A comparative study of family and kinship idioms in English and Chinese: An analysis of 50 common idioms.

**1. Phần nhận xét của giảng viên chấm phản biện**

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**2. Những mặt còn hạn chế**

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**3. Ý kiến của giảng viên chấm phản biện**

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(Ký và ghi rõ tên)

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Finally, my heartfelt thanks go to my beloved family and friends, whose love, patience, and encouragement have been a constant source of motivation during the writing of this thesis.

## STATEMENT

I hereby solemnly declare that the graduation thesis entitled “*A Comparative Study of Family and Kinship Idioms in English and Chinese: An Analysis of 50 Common Idioms*” is an independent research work completed under the supervision of Ms Bui Thi Mai Anh (M.A). All contents, data, analytical results, and viewpoints presented in this thesis are derived from my own investigation, data collection, processing, and analysis. The research has been conducted with honesty, objectivity, and strict adherence to academic integrity and ethical principles.

I confirm that this thesis contains no plagiarism and does not duplicate any previously published research. All sources of information, including literature, theories, models, charts, and citations, have been clearly acknowledged in accordance with academic referencing standards. All survey data were collected through transparent procedures that fully respect participants’ privacy, confidentiality, and voluntary participation.

I take full responsibility before the university and the law for the accuracy and authenticity of all contents and findings presented in this thesis. Should any mistake, misconduct, or violation of regulations be identified during or after the completion of this thesis, I am willing to accept any actions or penalties imposed by the university or the relevant authorities.

I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Ms Bui Thi Mai Anh (M.A), for her valuable guidance throughout the research process. However, any shortcomings or limitations that may appear in this thesis are solely due to my own abilities and do not involve my supervisor or any other individual or organization.

I hereby affirm that all statements above are entirely true.

Hải Phòng, Date 27/12/2025

**Candidate:**

(Signature and full name)

Phạm Thị Thanh Xuân

## ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates and compares family and kinship idioms in English and Chinese. By analyzing 50 idioms (25 in English and 25 in Chinese), the study explores how linguistic expressions reflect cultural values, familial relationships, and social norms in both societies.

The findings reveal that both languages emphasize the importance of family, filial piety, and moral values; however, they differ significantly in their cultural orientation. English idioms often highlight individuality, practicality, and emotional expression, while Chinese idioms are deeply rooted in Confucian philosophy, moral hierarchy, and collectivism.

This research contributes to a deeper understanding of cross-cultural communication, translation equivalence, and idiomatic instruction in language learning.

**Keywords:** idioms, family, kinship, English, Chinese, cultural comparison

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# **PART I: INTRODUCTION**

## **1.1. Rationale**

Language is not only a means of communication but also a carrier of culture, history, and collective experience. Idioms, in particular, vividly reflect a community's worldview, values, and patterns of thought. As Makkai, A. (1972) notes, idioms are “frozen patterns” that reveal the social psychology of a people.

Both English and Chinese possess rich idiomatic traditions shaped by religion, social organization, and family structure. Among them, family and kinship idioms are especially revealing, as the family represents the core unit of social life and moral education.

Despite the universality of family, English and Chinese idioms differ significantly in imagery and cultural emphasis. English idioms such as blood is thicker than water or like father, like son tend to highlight emotional bonds and individual traits. In contrast, Chinese idioms like 血浓于水 or 虎父无犬子 often convey moral judgment, hierarchy, and collective family honor, reflecting Confucian values.

These differences are cultural rather than merely linguistic. English idioms are influenced by Western individualism and pragmatic thinking, while Chinese idioms are deeply rooted in Confucian ethics, emphasizing moral order, filial piety, and relational harmony.

In the context of globalization, understanding such idiomatic differences is crucial for translation, language learning, and intercultural communication. This study therefore examines English and Chinese family idioms as linguistic expressions of cultural ideology, offering insights into how language encodes social values and worldviews.

## **1.2. Aims and Objectives of the study**

### **1.2.1. Aims**

The main aim of this study is to conduct a comparative analysis of 50 commonly used idioms related to family and kinship in English and Chinese. The study seeks to identify

both linguistic and cultural similarities and differences, providing insights into how idioms reflect cultural values and social norms in each language.

### **1.2.2. Objectives**

To achieve this aim, the study has the following specific objectives:

1. To collect and categorize 50 idioms related to family and kinship in both English and Chinese, ensuring they are representative and culturally relevant.
2. To analyze the meanings, origins, and cultural connotations of the selected idioms.
3. To compare the structural and semantic features of English and Chinese idioms, highlighting similarities and differences in form and meaning.
4. To conduct a survey among students at Hai Phong University of Management and Technology (HPU) to evaluate their understanding and interpretation of these idioms.
5. To provide pedagogical implications for teaching idioms effectively in foreign language learning contexts.

### **1.3. Object and Scope of the Study**

This study examines 50 commonly used English and Chinese idioms related to family and kinship. These idioms were carefully selected from authoritative dictionaries and linguistic corpora to ensure their accuracy, representativeness, and cultural relevance. The research focuses on analyzing their linguistic characteristics, figurative meanings, cultural backgrounds, and cross-linguistic correspondences. In addition, it investigates students' comprehension and interpretation of these idioms, with particular attention to the influence of academic background on idiom understanding and intercultural awareness.

The research participants consist of approximately 40 students majoring in English and Chinese at Hai Phong University of Management and Technology (HPU). This group represents a typical university learner population with sufficient language proficiency,

making it appropriate for examining idiom comprehension, interpretation, and cultural understanding.

#### **1.4. Methods of the study**

This study mainly employs two research methods: the comparative method and the survey method. These two approaches are used together to ensure that both the linguistic and practical aspects of idioms are clearly examined and supported by real data.

##### **1.4.1. Comparative Method**

The comparative method is used to analyze and compare 50 common family and kinship idioms in English and Chinese. Each idiom is studied in terms of:

- Its literal and figurative meanings,
- Its cultural implications, and
- Its usage in communication.

By comparing idioms in both languages, the study aims to find out similarities and differences in how English and Chinese people express family relationships, emotions, and values through idioms.

##### **1.4.2. Survey Method**

The survey method is applied to collect information about students' understanding and perception of English and Chinese family idioms.

A questionnaire is designed and distributed to around 40 students from the Faculty of English–Chinese Language at Hai Phong University.

The survey includes questions about:

- The students' ability to recognize and understand idioms.
- Their opinions about cultural meanings.
- Their challenges when learning idioms.

The results of the survey will help the researcher identify how students comprehend idioms in both languages and whether cultural background affects their understanding.

### **1.4.3. Summary**

In brief, this study combines comparative linguistic analysis with a student survey to gain a full understanding of family and kinship idioms in English and Chinese. The comparative method provides insights into language and culture, while the survey method adds practical evidence from real learners.

### **1.5. Design of the study**

The study consists of three main points: Introduction, Development, and Conclusion.

Part I: Introduction shows reasons to choose the study, the aims, scope, methods, and design of the study.

Part II: Development

- Chapter 1: Literature Review – This chapter outlines the definitions, features, classifications, and cultural aspects of idioms, and reviews previous research on English and Chinese idioms to build the study's theoretical foundation.
- Chapter 2: Research Methodology – This chapter outlines the research design- participants, instruments, materials, and procedures - and identifies and classifies the 50 selected idioms as the basis for later analysis
- Chapter 3: Data Analysis – This chapter compares the 50 idioms by analyzing their linguistic structures, semantic meanings, and figurative uses in English and Chinese.
- Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion – This chapter examines the cultural, social, and philosophical differences reflected in the idioms and discusses their pedagogical implications for teaching idioms in foreign language learning.

Part III: Conclusion summarizes the discussed parts in the paper and some suggestions for further study

## PART II: DEVELOPMENT

### CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 1.1. Definition and Nature of Idioms

Idioms are fixed expressions whose meanings cannot be deduced from the meanings of their individual words. According to the Oxford Dictionary of English Idioms (2010), “an idiom is a group of words established by usage as having a meaning not deducible from those of the individual words.” Furthermore, idioms often reflect a community’s shared experiences, cultural values, and social norms Merriam Webster (2025), Cambridge Dictionary (2025). This indicates that understanding idioms requires not only linguistic knowledge but also familiarity with the cultural and social context in which they are used. In both English and Chinese, idioms play an essential role in expressing cultural wisdom and moral lessons. However, Chinese idioms (成语 chéngyǔ) often derive from classical literature, historical events, or Confucian moral principles, while English idioms tend to arise from daily life, religion, and folklore.

#### 1.2. Classification of Idioms

Many scholars Moon, R. (1998), Katsarou, E. C. (2011) have proposed that idioms can be classified according to form, meaning, and cultural content. Understanding these classifications is essential for analyzing idioms in both linguistic and cultural contexts.

##### a. By Structure

Idioms can be grouped based on their grammatical and syntactic structures:

- Phrase idioms: Short idiomatic phrases that function as a single unit (e.g., “piece of cake”, “bread and butter”).
- Sentence idioms: Complete sentences that carry idiomatic meaning (e.g., “The early bird catches the worm”).
- Proverbial idioms: Traditional proverbs expressing general truths or advice (e.g., “Don’t count your chickens before they hatch”).

## b. By Meaning

Idioms can also be classified according to the transparency of their figurative meaning:

- Transparent idioms: Meanings are close to the literal sense, making them easy to interpret (e.g., “lend a hand”).
- Semi-transparent idioms: Partially figurative, requiring some inferencing to understand (e.g., “see eye to eye”).
- Opaque idioms: Completely figurative, with meanings that cannot be inferred from the literal words (e.g., “kick the bucket”).

## c. By Cultural Content

Idioms often reflect cultural knowledge, beliefs, or social practices. They can be categorized according to their thematic content:

- Nature-related idioms: e.g., “under the weather”, “风雨同舟”.
- Body-related idioms: e.g., “cold feet”, “心心相印”.
- Family-related idioms: e.g., “black sheep of the family”, “父慈子孝”.

\*The current research focuses on family-related idioms, examining their linguistic structures, semantic meanings, and cultural significance in both English and Chinese.

This classification framework provides a systematic approach for analyzing idioms, helping to distinguish structural, semantic, and cultural features relevant to cross-linguistic comparison.

### **1.3. Idioms and Culture**

Language and culture are deeply interconnected. As Kramsch, C. (1998) notes, language functions not only as a means of communication but also as a reflection of social identity and cultural values. Idioms, as fixed figurative expressions, clearly embody the beliefs, values, and cognitive patterns of a speech community.

English idioms often reflect individualism, practicality, and directness. Expressions such as “stand on your own two feet” emphasize independence, while “hit the nail on the head” highlights efficiency and clarity. These idioms mirror cultural preferences for self-reliance and problem-solving.

By contrast, Chinese idioms commonly emphasize collectivism, moral conduct, and social harmony. Idioms like “兄友弟恭” stress proper familial relationships, while “和为贵” underscores the importance of harmony, reflecting Confucian cultural values.

Overall, idioms function as cultural symbols that reveal national identity, social norms, and collective ways of thinking. Studying idioms therefore enhances both linguistic competence and cross-cultural awareness, making them a vital component of language learning and intercultural communication.

#### **1.4. Family and Kinship Idioms: A Cultural Category**

Family and kinship idioms are expressions related to family members and blood relations, often conveying deep cultural meanings about morality, hierarchy, and emotional bonds.

In Chinese culture, filial piety (孝) plays a central role, so many idioms emphasize respect, obedience, and family responsibility, as seen in “子不教，父之过”, which highlights parental moral duty.

By contrast, English family idioms tend to reflect individualism and emotional equality. Expressions such as “Like father, like son” focus on inherited traits, while “Blood is thicker than water” emphasizes family loyalty rather than strict hierarchy.

#### **1.5. Previous Comparative Studies**

Many previous studies have examined English and Chinese idioms from linguistic, cultural, and cognitive perspectives, offering important insights into cross-linguistic similarities and differences.

- Jiang, X., & Liu, J. (2018) compared English and Chinese idioms and showed that idioms function not only as linguistic units but also as carriers of cultural values and social norms.
- Sun, H. (2021) approached idiom translation from a cultural perspective, arguing that literal translation often leads to the loss of cultural meaning and intercultural misunderstanding.
- Sun, Y., & Zhengjie, L. (2018) focused on translation strategies for English and Chinese idioms, emphasizing the necessity of considering historical, moral, and social contexts.

Overall, existing research confirms that idioms reflect cultural cognition as much as linguistic structure. However, most studies focus on idioms in general or on semantic fields such as animals, colors, or emotions. Family and kinship idioms remain underexplored, which this study addresses by systematically comparing 50 commonly used idioms in English and Chinese.

## **1.6. Summary**

This chapter has reviewed the definitions, linguistic features, classifications, and cultural aspects of idioms, as well as previous studies focusing on English and Chinese idioms. The literature review demonstrates that idioms function not only as linguistic expressions but also as reflections of cultural beliefs, social norms, and historical values.

The theoretical foundation established in this chapter provides a clear rationale for the present study. Building on this understanding, the next chapter will present the research design, including the selection of participants, development of instruments, data collection procedures, and methods of data analysis.

## **CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1. Research Design**

This study adopts a mixed-method research design that combines qualitative comparative analysis with quantitative survey research. This approach allows the study to examine both the linguistic and cultural features of English and Chinese family idioms, as well as learners' comprehension and interpretation.

The qualitative part analyzes 50 idioms (25 English and 25 Chinese) in terms of structure, figurative meaning, cultural background, and cross-linguistic equivalence. The quantitative part consists of a survey administered to 40 undergraduate students, providing data on their understanding, difficulties, and intercultural awareness of idioms.

### **2.2. Participants**

This study involved 40 undergraduate students from the Faculty of English–Chinese Language at Hai Phong University of Management and Technology (HPU). Participants were selected using convenience sampling, which is suitable for educational research with accessible learner groups. The sample was evenly divided into 20 English majors and 20 Chinese majors to allow comparative analysis. All participants were between 18 and 22 years old and had received formal training in their respective language majors, making them appropriate for evaluating idiom comprehension and cross-cultural understanding.

### **2.3. Materials**

The primary materials of this study include 50 family- and kinship-related idioms selected for cross-linguistic and cultural analysis. These idioms were collected from reliable English and Chinese dictionaries, linguistic corpora, and academic sources to ensure their representativeness.

#### **The selection criteria focus on:**

- (1) Frequent use in daily communication.
- (2) Cultural significance related to family values, social norms, or historical contexts.

(3) Familiarity to native speakers.

(4) Suitability for English–Chinese comparison through equivalents or partial correspondences.

(5) Clarity of figurative meaning.

Each idiom was documented with its literal meaning, figurative interpretation, usage example, cultural background, and possible equivalent in the other language. These materials form a solid basis for both qualitative and quantitative analyses of English and Chinese family-related idioms.

### **Sources of Idioms:**

The idioms analyzed in this study were collected from authoritative English and Chinese idiom dictionaries and large-scale linguistic corpora to ensure reliability, representativeness, and cross-linguistic comparability. The main sources include the Oxford Idioms Dictionary and Cambridge Idioms Dictionary for English idioms, and 现代汉语成语大词典 and 汉语大词典 for Chinese idioms, which provide standardized definitions and usage contexts. In addition, the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and the BCC Corpus (Beijing Language and Culture University Corpus) were used to verify actual usage frequency and authentic contexts. Together, these sources support the selection of 50 representative and frequently used idioms suitable for English–Chinese comparative analysis.

### **2.4. Instruments**

Two main instruments were used in this study: an idiom analysis framework and a student questionnaire, which together provide both qualitative and quantitative perspectives on idiom usage and learner comprehension.

#### **(1) Idiom Analysis Framework**

The idiom analysis framework was developed by the researcher based on relevant literature and linguistic principles to examine the linguistic and cultural features of idioms. It focuses on idiom structure, literal and figurative meanings, cultural-historical

background, semantic equivalence across languages, translation possibilities, and thematic classification related to family and kinship. This framework enables a systematic and culturally informed analysis of the 50 selected idioms.

## (2) Student Questionnaire

The student questionnaire was designed to investigate learners' understanding and interpretation of the selected idioms. It consists of three main sections:

- Section A: Participant information – Collects demographic data such as age, gender, and major.
- Section B: Judgments on understanding – Uses a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) to measure students' perceived comprehension and familiarity with each idiom.
- Section C: Short-answer items – Clarify the feeling of students about the awareness and cultural values of idioms.

Together, these instruments allow the researcher to gather both descriptive and evaluative data, enabling a thorough qualitative and quantitative analysis.

## **2.5. Data Collection Procedure**

The data collection procedure was conducted in five systematic stages to ensure the validity and reliability of the study.

**Step 1: Compilation of Idioms** Over 120 idioms were gathered from reputable English and Chinese dictionaries and corpora. After evaluating their frequency, clarity, and representativeness, 50 idioms were selected to ensure cultural relevance and suitability for cross-linguistic comparison.

**Step 2: Designing the Questionnaire** A questionnaire assessing students' understanding of the idioms was drafted and reviewed by two lecturers for clarity and accuracy. A pilot test with five students helped identify ambiguous items, and revisions were made before finalizing the instrument.

Step 3: Conducting the Survey The survey was administered online via Google Forms for seven days. Participation was voluntary, with clear instructions and assurances of confidentiality provided to all respondents.

Step 4: Screening and Organizing Data Of the 42 responses collected, 40 valid questionnaires were retained after removing incomplete or duplicate submissions. Valid data were coded and categorized for subsequent analysis.

Step 5: Idiom Analysis The 50 idioms were analyzed based on figurative meaning, cultural elements, and cross-linguistic equivalence. Findings were organized into tables to support both qualitative and quantitative interpretation.

## **2.6. Data Analysis**

Data analysis in this study consists of two major components to ensure a comprehensive interpretation of idioms and learners' responses.

### **(1) Qualitative Analysis of Idioms**

The qualitative component focuses on analyzing the linguistic and cultural characteristics of the selected idioms. This includes:

- Interpreting figurative meanings: Identifying the underlying metaphorical or symbolic meanings embedded in English and Chinese idioms.
- Identifying cultural elements: Examining cultural concepts, values, and historical references reflected in idioms from both languages.
- Comparing cross-linguistic equivalents: Determining similarities, differences, and partial correspondences in meaning and structure between English and Chinese idioms.
- Categorizing idioms into thematic subfields: Classifying idioms according to semantic themes such as kinship roles, family hierarchy, marriage relationships, or intergenerational interactions.

This qualitative analysis provides a deeper understanding of how each idiom reflects cultural perspectives on family and kinship.

## (2) Quantitative Analysis of Survey Data

The quantitative component analyzes responses collected from student participants. Data are processed using basic descriptive statistics, including:

- Frequencies to identify the distribution of students' answers.
- Mean scores to assess overall levels of comprehension and recognition of idioms.
- Comparisons between English-major and Chinese-major students to determine whether academic background affects idiom understanding.

These statistical procedures support interpretations of learners' familiarity with idioms and highlight possible differences in comprehension across groups.

### **2.7. Summary**

This chapter has outlined the overall methodological framework of the study, including the research design, participants, materials, instruments, procedures, and methods of data analysis. By adopting a simplified yet systematic approach, the chapter ensures that the research process remains feasible, coherent, and academically reliable. The methodological choices made here lay a solid foundation for the subsequent analysis and discussion presented in the following chapter.

## **CHAPTER 3: DATA ANALYSIS**

### **3.1. Qualitative Analysis of Idioms**

The qualitative analysis aims to explore the linguistic structure, cognitive mechanisms, and cultural conceptualizations embedded in the 50 English and Chinese idioms selected for this study. While quantitative analysis focuses on numerical trends such as comprehension levels and frequency patterns, qualitative analysis examines the deeper interpretive layers of idioms, including metaphorical foundations, symbolic meanings, cultural references, and socio-historical origins, which cannot be fully captured through statistical data alone.

From a qualitative perspective, idioms are viewed as culturally condensed units of meaning that encode collective values, social norms, and shared experiences. Effective idiom comprehension therefore requires not only lexical knowledge but also awareness of conceptual metaphors, cognitive mappings, and cultural scripts. For Vietnamese learners, differences in accessibility arise between English idioms, which often rely on more universal imagery, and Chinese idioms, which frequently draw on classical literature, Confucian values, kinship systems, and historical allusions.

To examine these dimensions systematically, the qualitative analysis is organized around four analytical frameworks adapted from contemporary idiom studies Kövecses, Z. (2010), Wu, Q. (2019):

#### **a) Interpreting figurative meanings**

This dimension investigates how idioms encode figurative meanings through metaphors, metonymy, conceptual blending, and cultural models. By examining the cognitive processes learners employ when interpreting idioms, this section highlights why some idioms are transparent while others remain opaque.

#### **b) Identifying cultural elements**

Idioms function as cultural artifacts. This part examines how moral values, family hierarchy, societal expectations, and historical narratives shape idiom meanings. It

highlights the cultural distance that learners must overcome to grasp the deeper significance of culturally bound expressions.

c) Comparing cross-linguistic equivalents

This dimension compares structural features, metaphorical patterns, communicative functions, and cultural motivations behind idioms in the two languages. It identifies both universal conceptualizations (e.g., family unity, blood ties) and culture-specific patterns found only in one linguistic tradition.

d) Categorizing idioms into thematic subfields

The selected idioms are classified into thematic categories such as kinship relations, filial piety, family unity, moral obligations, emotional bonds, and intergenerational dynamics. This thematic approach highlights semantic clusters and reveals the underlying cultural logic that organizes idioms within each language.

By examining these dimensions, the qualitative analysis interprets idioms not only as linguistic expressions but also as cultural, cognitive, and symbolic systems. This multi-layered perspective explains variations in idiom comprehension across languages and clarifies why certain idioms impose greater cognitive and cultural demands on learners.

### **3.1.1 Interpretation of Figurative Meanings**

#### **3.1.1.1. English Idioms: Transparency and Embodied Metaphors**

a) Cognitive foundations of English kinship idioms

From a cognitive linguistic perspective, English kinship idioms are grounded in embodied experience, where abstract family meanings are constructed from concrete physical perceptions. Following Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980) and Kövecses (2010), these idioms map everyday experiences such as physical proximity, resemblance, contrast, and material properties onto social relationships and family expectations. Because these mappings are based on universally shared bodily experience, the cognitive distance between literal imagery and figurative meaning is relatively small. As noted by Gibbs, R. W., Jr. (2005), idiom comprehension is motivated by conceptual metaphors rather than arbitrary conventions, allowing learners to infer meanings without extensive cultural knowledge.

## b) Detailed idiom analyses

Idioms such as “blood is thicker than water” illustrate how English kinship idioms rely on embodied metaphors rather than cultural or historical knowledge. The physical notion of density is mapped onto relational strength, conveying the primacy of kinship bonds in a cognitively transparent way Allan, K. (2006). Similarly, “like father, like son” draws on visual resemblance, a basic perceptual cue through which humans naturally infer shared traits Zebrowitz, L. (1997), making its meaning immediately accessible across cultures.

In “the black sheep of the family,” visual contrast functions as a metaphor for social deviance. As Kövecses (2015) notes, salient perceptual features such as color differences strongly motivate metaphorical reasoning, allowing the idiom to be understood without specific cultural knowledge. Other expressions like “runs in the family,” “keep it in the family,” and “wear the pants in the family” follow the same embodied logic, using flow, containment, and clothing to conceptualize inheritance, secrecy, and authority. Together, these idioms demonstrate how English kinship expressions are grounded in universal bodily and perceptual experience, facilitating learner comprehension.

## c) Cultural interpretation and pedagogical implications

Because English kinship idioms are grounded in universal embodied metaphors, they generally impose a low cultural burden on learners. This allows instruction to focus on collocation, pragmatic use, and register. Research in idiom pedagogy Boers, F., & Lindstromberg, S. (2008), Liantas, J. (2017) shows that learners benefit most from contextualized teaching that highlights the image–meaning relationship, supported by multimodal input such as narratives, dialogues, or audiovisual materials.

However, idiomatic meaning is sensitive to tone, irony, and context. Instruction should therefore address pragmatic nuances, including appropriateness, register, and figurative intent. Classroom activities such as paraphrasing idioms, relating them to personal

experience, or comparing idioms with similar themes can effectively enhance both comprehension and productive use.

### **3.1.1.2. Chinese Idioms: Opacity, Classical Allusions, and Embodied–Cultural Metaphors**

Chinese idioms (chéngyǔ) occupy a central role in the Sinosphere and are widely regarded as less semantically transparent than English idioms due to their historical depth, cultural density, and syntactic compression Yu, N. (2009). While English idioms often derive figurative meaning directly from universal embodied experience, Chinese idioms typically combine embodied imagery with classical literary and historical allusions, which frequently obscure their literal meanings.

This contrast is especially evident in kinship-related idioms. Chinese kinship idioms often encode Confucian ethical values such as filial piety (孝), fraternal harmony (悌), hierarchical order (序), and ancestral continuity (宗), transforming bodily metaphors into culturally moralized symbols. For native speakers, these idioms activate shared cultural scripts; for non-native learners, the absence of such cultural knowledge often makes interpretation challenging. Illustrative Idioms and Their Interpretive Mechanisms

#### a) 骨肉至亲 (gǔ ròu zhì qīn) - “bone-and-flesh intimate kinship”

The idiom employs the imagery of bones and flesh, two inseparable components of the human body, to conceptualize the closeness of blood relatives. The bodily domain serves not merely as a physical reference but as a symbol of existential unity; kinship is framed as something inherent, immutable, and ontologically grounded.

This idiom demonstrates how the Chinese language intensifies bodily metaphor beyond the English use of “blood,” embedding it within a larger cultural framework of identity and kin solidarity.

#### b) 手足情深 (shǒuzú qíngshēn) - “hand-and-foot deep affection (between siblings)”

Hands and feet are body parts that naturally coordinate; mapping this harmonious bodily cooperation onto sibling relations constructs a metaphor of interdependence, mutual support, and functional unity.

Compared to English idioms, which often highlight resemblance or individual traits, this expression foregrounds collective coordination, reflecting the Confucian view of the family as an organic whole rather than a set of individuals.

c) 一母同胞 (yī mǔ tóng bāo) - “born from the same womb”

By invoking the literal imagery of siblings sharing the same maternal womb, the idiom highlights the purity and legitimacy of consanguinity, a concept deeply embedded in traditional patrilineal and Confucian kinship systems.

The idiom reflects the Chinese linguistic tendency to classify kinship relations with remarkable precision, integrating biological imagery into moral and genealogical discourse.

### 1. Embodied Metaphor with Cultural Mediation

Although Chinese kinship idioms employ bodily imagery, the interpretation of these images is rarely universal. Bodily metaphors are culturally mediated, acquiring figurative meaning through philosophical traditions and classical texts, so that the body functions as a morally encoded cultural structure rather than a neutral experiential domain Yu, N. (2009)

In contrast, English kinship idioms rely on largely universal, perceptually grounded embodied metaphors, which require relatively little cultural knowledge for interpretation.

### 3. Why Chinese Idioms Are Less Transparent

Chinese idioms—particularly *chéngyǔ* (成语)—are widely regarded as less semantically transparent than English idioms. Research in Chinese linguistics and

cultural semiotics indicates that their figurative meanings are often not inferable from literal forms, but instead depend on cultural memory, classical textual traditions, and archaic linguistic structures Moratto, R. (2024), Ho, W. Y., & C. K.(2014), Huang, W., & Wang, H. (2020). Unlike English idioms, which commonly derive meaning from universal embodied experience, Chinese idioms are culturally dense, historically layered, and syntactically compressed. This semantic opacity can be explained by three major factors.

#### a) Historical Dependence on Classical Sources

Many Chinese idioms originate from Classical Chinese texts such as the Analects, Zuo Zhuan, and Shiji. Instead of transparent metaphor, they compress historical events or moral lessons into four characters. Idioms like 破釜沉舟 (“break the cauldrons and sink the boats”) or 指鹿為馬 (“call a deer a horse”) are difficult to understand without knowledge of the original stories, as their literal meanings offer little guidance. Therefore, comprehension depends heavily on familiarity with classical literature and historical context.

#### b) High Cultural Density

Chinese idioms frequently encode Confucian values, ethical norms, and culturally specific social hierarchies. Many *chéngyǔ* function not merely as descriptive expressions but as moral evaluations linked to filial piety, loyalty, ritual propriety, and family harmony.

For instance:

- 家和万事兴 (“when the family is harmonious, everything prospers”) assumes Confucian ideals of domestic stability.
- 父慈子孝 (“a kind father and a filial son”) directly conveys behavioral standards for ideal family relations.

Understanding such idioms therefore requires interpretation of both linguistic form and the underlying ethical worldview, resulting in a higher cultural load for non-native learners Huang, W., & Wang, H.(2020).

### c) Compressed Classical Chinese Syntax

Chinese idioms are typically formed using the four-character Classical Chinese structure, which relies on extreme grammatical compression. Classical Chinese allows for widespread omission of grammatical elements—subjects, objects, connectives, tense markers—resulting in highly condensed expressions.

Chengyu thus frequently include:

- Ellipsis
- Archaic vocabulary no longer used in Modern Mandarin
- Syntactic structures typical of Classical Chinese
- Dense metaphorical or symbolic substitution

For learners familiar with modern Mandarin's analytic grammar, *chéngyǔ* are often opaque. Their syntax and semantics follow rules closer to Classical Chinese than contemporary Mandarin, making direct interpretation difficult and unintuitive for modern learners.

### 3.1.2 Identification of Cultural Elements

Idioms are more than linguistic expressions; they function as cultural vessels, carrying shared values, social norms, historical narratives, and cognitive frameworks Kövecses, Z. (2010), Mieder, W. (2004). Family and kinship idioms, in particular, reflect how societies perceive family roles, social obligations, and interpersonal expectations. This study examines cultural elements in English and Chinese idioms along four dimensions: individualism versus collectivism, hierarchical structures, moral and ethical expectations, and historical-literary allusions.

### **3.1.2.1. Cultural Elements in English Idioms**

English idioms about family often emphasize individual traits, personal morality, and behavioral evaluation, reflecting Hofstede, G. (2001), Gibbs, R. W., Jr.(1994).

For example, “black sheep of the family” highlights a deviant family member, while “chip off the old block” emphasizes inherited traits. Moral evaluation appears in idioms like “the prodigal son,” promoting ethical behavior, repentance, and forgiveness. Expressions such as “wear the pants in the family” reflect historical gender norms but are now often used metaphorically or humorously. English idioms are typically concrete and visually grounded; metaphors from everyday experience, such as “blood is thicker than water,” make meanings relatively transparent to non-native speakers.

### **3.1.2.2. Cultural Elements in Chinese Idioms**

Chinese idioms often prescribe behavior, emphasize relational obligations, and reinforce moral norms, reflecting Confucian values such as hierarchy, filial piety, and social harmony Yu, N. (2009), Moratto, R. (2024). Idioms like 长幼有序 (elders and juniors should follow order) and 夫为妻纲 (husband as head of wife) stress respect for hierarchy, while 孝顺父母 (be filial to parents) and 父慈子孝 (benevolent father and filial son) highlight moral duties within the family. Expressions such as 家和万事兴 (family harmony brings prosperity) emphasize collective well-being. Many idioms, like 虎父无犬子 (a tiger father has no dog son), require knowledge of classical literature, encoding cultural literacy and transmitting collective memory across generations.

### **3.1.2.3. Comparative Summary**

Overall, the contrast between English and Chinese idioms is striking. English idioms often describe family dynamics and individual behavior, highlighting personal choice and moral evaluation. In contrast, Chinese idioms typically prescribe behavior according to hierarchical, filial, and collective norms, embedding Confucian values into everyday expressions.

<b>Aspect</b>	<b>English Idioms</b>	<b>Chinese</b>	<b>Cultural Implication</b>	<b>Example</b>
<b>Individualism</b>	High – focuses on personal traits, behavior, and moral choices. English idioms highlight uniqueness or distinctiveness within a family.	Low – focuses on family roles and social obligations. Chinese idioms emphasize fulfilling duties and behaving according to family expectations.	Western cultures value self-expression and personal development; Chinese culture emphasizes relational duty and obedience within the family.	English: “ <i>black sheep of the family</i> ” – someone who stands out or misbehaves; “ <i>chip off the old block</i> ” – child resembles parent in traits. Chinese: “父慈子孝” – father benevolent, son filial; “长幼有序” – elders and juniors follow proper order.
<b>Hierarchy</b>	Rarely encoded; English idioms do not usually emphasize formal hierarchical roles, though some reflect	Frequently encoded; Chinese idioms stress elder-younger, husband-wife, parent-child roles as prescribed.	Confucian ethics guide family hierarchy in Chinese culture; respect for elders and structured roles are central. English idioms reflect more	English: “ <i>wear the pants in the family</i> ” – hints at traditional male authority, often used humorously. Chinese: “夫为妻纲” – husband is head

	historical gender norms.		egalitarian social relations.	of wife, reflecting Confucian hierarchy.
<b>Moral function</b>	Observational and descriptive; idioms describe behavior, sometimes giving subtle guidance on right vs. wrong.	Prescriptive and normative; idioms guide behavior, enforce moral duties, and illustrate proper conduct within family and society.	English idioms describe behavior or personality; Chinese idioms often aim to teach ethical conduct and enforce social norms.	English: “ <i>the prodigal son</i> ” – moral narrative of repentance. Chinese: “孝顺父母” – emphasizes filial duties.
<b>Imagery</b>	Concrete and everyday; English idioms use familiar objects, actions, or situations.	Symbolic, historical, literary; Chinese idioms often require knowledge of classical stories or history.	Chinese idioms demand cultural literacy to fully understand; English idioms are usually semantically transparent.	English: “ <i>blood is thicker than water</i> ” – family loyalty visualized by blood vs. water. Chinese: “虎父无犬子” – derived from classical literature; requires cultural knowledge.

<b>Collectivism</b>	Low; idioms focus on individual behavior rather than group harmony.	High; idioms emphasize family cohesion, social harmony, and collective well-being.	Chinese culture prioritizes family as the foundation of social stability; individual desires are often subordinated to collective interests.	English: “ <i>like father, like son</i> ” – focuses on personal similarity. Chinese: “ <i>家和万事兴</i> ” – family harmony brings prosperity to all endeavors.
<b>Emotional and Social Evaluation</b>	Evaluative of individual behavior: praise, criticism, or humor.	Prescriptive, linking emotions to social and familial duties.	English idioms highlight personal traits; Chinese idioms stress moral propriety and emotional regulation in line with social norms.	English: “ <i>black sheep of the family</i> ” – socially disapproved behavior. Chinese: “ <i>孝敬父母</i> ” – expected emotional respect toward parents.
<b>Contextual Transparency</b>	High; idioms generally understandable with minimal cultural knowledge.	Low; idioms require knowledge of history, literature, or philosophy.	Chinese idioms encode dense cultural information, needing interpretation;	English: “ <i>chip off the old block</i> ” – intuitive metaphor. Chinese: “ <i>画龙</i> ”

			English idioms are more direct.	点睛” – ‘adding the finishing touch’ from a historical story.
<b>Transmission of Cultural Values</b>	Implicit; conveyed through humor, narrative, or metaphor.	Explicit; instructive, maintaining social order and moral standards.	Chinese idioms function as moral education tools; English idioms reflect societal observation or commentary.	English: “ <i>the prodigal son</i> ” – narrative lesson. Chinese: “礼尚往来” – mutual respect in social interactions.
<b>Social</b>	English idioms often facilitate observation-based learning of behavior in a family or social context.	Chinese idioms actively enforce learning of moral conduct, hierarchy, and filial piety.	English culture uses idioms for reflective or narrative learning; Chinese culture uses idioms for prescriptive, intergenerational education.	

### 3.1.3. Comparing cross-linguistic equivalents

The qualitative comparison of family and kinship idioms in English and Chinese reveals both universals and divergences. These similarities and differences are deeply rooted in cultural cognition, social values, and historical traditions of each society Mieder, W.(2004), Kövecses, Z. (2010).

#### 3.1.3.1. Areas of Similarity

Despite linguistic and cultural differences, English and Chinese idioms share several conceptual metaphors and thematic patterns:

a) Shared metaphors involving blood and lineage

ENG: “blood is thicker than water”

CHI: “血浓于水” (xuè nóng yú shuǐ)

Both idioms conceptualize family ties as blood, emphasizing that kinship bonds are stronger and more enduring than other social relationships.

b) Animal-based metaphors

ENG: “black sheep of the family”

CHI: “虎父无犬子” (*hǔ fù wú quǎn zǐ*, ‘cha hổ không có con chó’)

Both languages employ animal metaphors to describe family members’ behavior or intergenerational traits. Animals symbolize characteristics such as strength, virtue, or deviation from norms.

c) Inheritance and intergenerational metaphors

ENG: “chip off the old block”

CHI: “虎父无犬子” (*hǔ fù wú quǎn zǐ*)

Both idioms emphasize similarity between parents and children, reinforcing the concept of inherited traits or family legacy.

### 3.1.3.2. Areas of Difference

While sharing some universal metaphors, English and Chinese idioms also reveal significant divergences rooted in cultural priorities:

a) Hierarchy vs equality

Chinese idioms frequently encode structured family roles, emphasizing elder-younger, husband-wife, and parent-child hierarchies (长幼有序, 夫为妻纲).

English idioms rarely prescribe hierarchy; they focus on individual traits and behaviors, with social roles being less rigid.

#### b) Cultural density

Chinese idioms contain historical, literary, and philosophical depth, often requiring knowledge of classical literature or Confucian values.

English idioms rely on surface-level, experiential imagery and are generally easier for non-native speakers to interpret.

#### c) Moral function

Chinese idioms are prescriptive, aiming to teach moral lessons, filial piety, and social propriety (孝顺父母, 家和万事兴).

English idioms are descriptive, highlighting behaviors, traits, or patterns without necessarily instructing conduct.

#### d) Metaphor type

Chinese idioms tend to be symbolic, literary, and historical, often encapsulating cultural wisdom or collective memory.

English idioms are typically concrete, experiential, and visual, based on everyday experience and intuitive understanding.

### 3.1.3.3. Summary

The cross-linguistic analysis shows that while English and Chinese idioms share universal conceptual metaphors such as kinship, inheritance, and animal symbolism, they diverge in hierarchy encoding, moral prescription, cultural density, and metaphorical style.

These differences reflect broader cultural orientations: Western emphasis on individuality, descriptive evaluation, and experiential clarity; Chinese emphasis on hierarchy, moral education, and historical-literary depth.

#### **3.1.4. Categorizing idioms into thematic subfields**

To analyze the linguistic and cultural features of the selected idioms, they were grouped into four thematic subfields, each reflecting a particular aspect of family and kinship in English and Chinese. This thematic categorization provides a structured framework for examining how social norms, moral values, and intergenerational expectations are encoded in language, and how cultural priorities shape idiomatic expression Kövecses, Z. (2010), Mieder, W.(2004).

##### **3.1.4.1. Kinship Roles**

The first subfield, kinship roles, includes idioms describing family members and their associated traits or behaviors. English idioms like *mother hen* convey a protective, nurturing image, while *like father, like son* emphasizes inherited characteristics. In Chinese, idioms such as 父慈子孝 (fù cí zǐ xiào) highlight ideal parent–child harmony and filial piety, and 母以子贵 (mǔ yǐ zǐ guì) shows how a mother gains social prestige through her children Yu, N.(2009), Moratto, R. (2024). Overall, English idioms focus on individual traits and observable behavior, whereas Chinese idioms reinforce Confucian family ethics and social hierarchy Hofstede, G.(2001).

##### **3.1.4.2. Household Hierarchy**

The second subfield focuses on idioms encoding household hierarchy and structured family relationships. English idioms rarely reference hierarchy, reflecting a preference for egalitarianism and flexible roles. In contrast, Chinese idioms such as 长幼有序 (zhǎng yòu yǒu xù) emphasize proper order between elders and juniors, and 夫为妻纲 (fū wéi qī gāng) indicates the husband’s authority over his wife. These expressions reflect Confucian values of hierarchy, respect, and clearly defined family roles, which continue to shape Chinese social perceptions and language Hofstede, G.(2001), Yu, N.(2009), Moratto, R. (2024).

### **3.1.4.3. Marriage and Spousal Relations**

The third subfield concerns idioms related to marriage, spousal responsibilities, and domestic authority. English idioms like *tie the knot* describe marriage neutrally or celebratorily, while *wear the pants* humorously denotes household authority. Chinese idioms such as 百年好合 (bǎi nián hǎo hé) express wishes for lasting marital harmony, and 嫁鸡随鸡 (jià jī suí jī) reflects traditional expectations that a wife follows her husband. Overall, English idioms are descriptive or humorous, whereas Chinese idioms are normative, emphasizing social expectations, marital harmony, and gender roles Moratto, R. (2024), Mieder, W.(2004).

### **3.1.4.4. Intergenerational Expectations**

The fourth subfield includes idioms highlighting parental hopes, family legacy, and intergenerational continuity. English idioms like *chip off the old block* emphasize resemblance between parents and children, focusing on observable traits rather than moral guidance. Chinese idioms such as 望子成龙 (wàng zǐ chéng lóng) express parental aspirations for children's success, reflecting moral and social expectations rooted in Confucian tradition. Both languages recognize intergenerational continuity, but Chinese idioms stress filial duty, social contribution, and child cultivation, while English idioms focus mainly on natural similarity or inherited traits Kövecses, Z. (2010), Gibbs, R. W., Jr. (1994).

### **3.1.4.5. Summary**

Overall, the thematic categorization shows that both English and Chinese idioms encode family and kinship concepts, but in culturally distinctive ways. English idioms emphasize individual traits, descriptive relationships, and observable behavior, reflecting personal autonomy and egalitarian norms. Chinese idioms highlight moral duty, hierarchical roles, social harmony, and intergenerational aspirations, reflecting Confucian ethics and cultural literacy Yu, N.(2009), Moratto, R. (2024), Hofstede, G.(2001). Analyzing idioms through these thematic subfields reveals how language mirrors cultural values and family ideologies across contexts.

## 3.2. Quantitative Analysis of Survey Data

### 3.2.1. Introduction to the Data

This chapter presents a systematic analysis of data from the online questionnaire, focusing on learners' comprehension of 50 English and Chinese idioms related to family and kinship. It also examines how demographic factors-age, gender, academic major, and self-reported language proficiency-affect understanding.

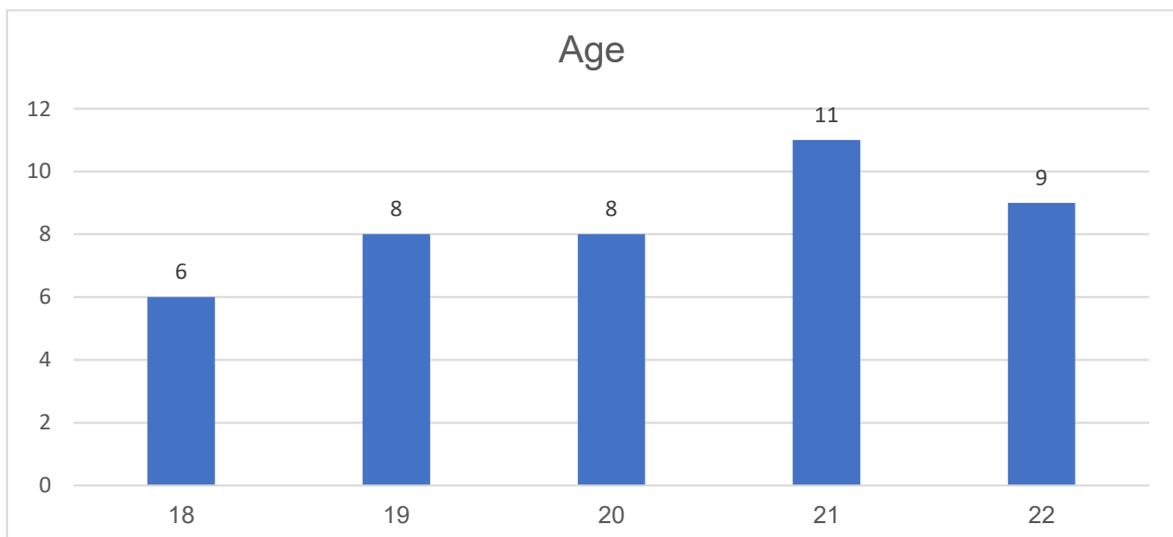
Beyond individual comprehension, the chapter also investigates learners' broader perceptions of idioms, such as:

- Cultural awareness associated with idiomatic expressions
- Perceived difficulty of interpreting idioms in each language
- Comparative familiarity with English versus Chinese idioms

Both quantitative (Likert-scale) and qualitative (open-ended) data are analyzed to provide a comprehensive view of learners' knowledge, interpretation strategies, and potential cross-cultural differences.

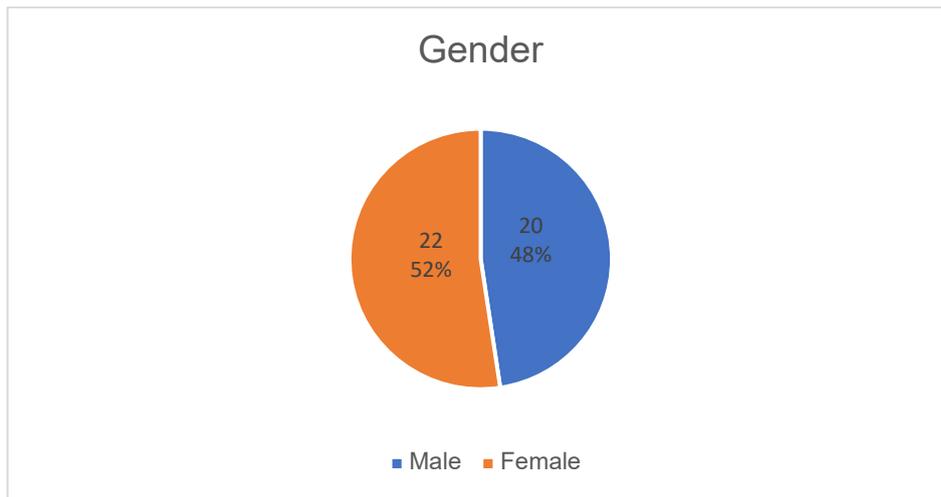
### 3.2.2. Demographic Profile of Participants

#### 3.2.2.1. Age distribution



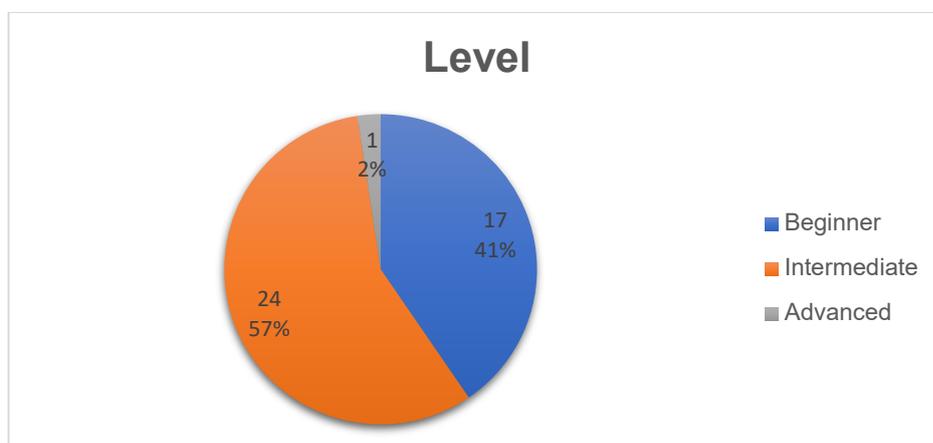
Participants ranged in age from 18 to 22 years old, which is typical of university-level learners. The majority of respondents were aged 21 and 22, indicating that most were in their third or fourth year of study. This relatively homogeneous age range provides a consistent basis for interpreting idiom comprehension, as participants are at similar stages of cognitive and linguistic development.

### 3.2.2.2 Gender distribution



Female participants made up a larger portion of the sample compared to male participants. This imbalance is typical in studies involving language learning, as language-major programs often attract predominantly female students. Although gender was not expected to be a significant factor in idiom comprehension, the distribution is noted here for analytical transparency.

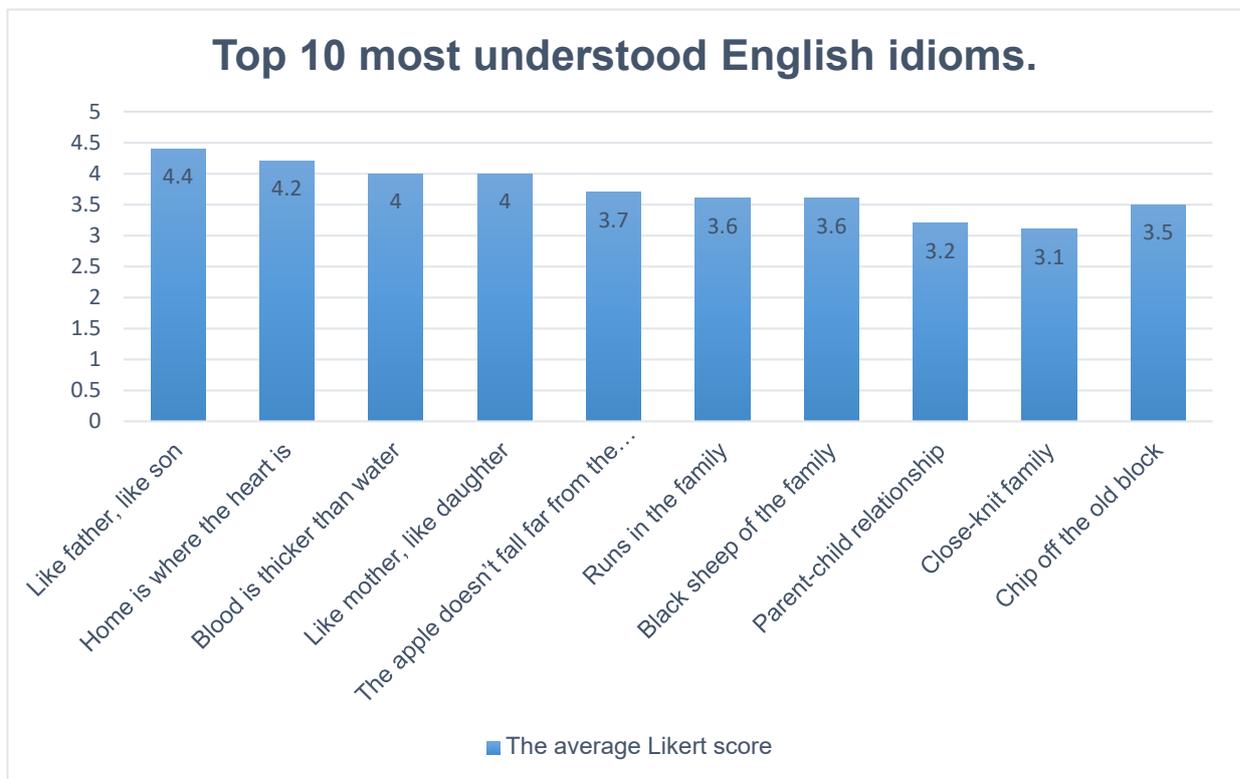
### 3.2.2.3. Proficiency Level



Most respondents rated themselves at Beginner or Intermediate proficiency. This aligns with the typical proficiency distribution among first- and second-year university students. Only a small percentage identified as Advanced, which is consistent with the expected challenges of learning idioms, as idiomatic comprehension often develops at higher proficiency levels.

### 3.2.3. Analysis of English Idioms

#### 3.2.3.1. Analysis of Students’ Comprehension of English Family and Kinship Idioms



Analysis of the Likert-scale responses shows that students generally demonstrate moderate to high comprehension of English family- and kinship-related idioms. Many respondents regularly encounter these idioms through textbooks, films, social media, classroom interaction, and daily communication, suggesting that English idioms occupy a prominent place in language-learning contexts in Vietnam. Average Likert scores for the 25 English idioms range from 2.9 to 4.4, indicating sufficient familiarity for accurate interpretation in most situations. Frequently encountered idioms—such as black sheep

of the family, like father, like son, family man, blood is thicker than water, and the apple doesn't fall far from the tree—receive the highest scores due to explicit teaching and repeated exposure.

Taken together, these findings suggest that English idioms are more accessible and comprehensible to learners than Chinese idioms, largely due to several advantages:

- Greater exposure through formal instruction and media consumption.
- Transparent metaphors that align with Vietnamese cultural thinking.
- Frequent appearance in familiar learning contexts.
- Higher overall English proficiency among Vietnamese students.

Consistent input and educational integration significantly enhance idiomatic knowledge acquisition.

### 3.2.3.2. Detailed Patterns in English Idiom Comprehension

#### a) Idioms with high comprehension

Among the English idioms included in the survey, several expressions receive consistently high comprehension scores due to their semantic transparency, cultural universality, and frequent presence in educational materials and popular media. The following examples illustrate this trend:

<b>Idiom</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Likert Avg.</b>
Like father, like son	Children resemble their parents	4.4
Home is where the heart is	Home is defined by emotional attachment, not place	4.2
Blood is thicker than water	Family ties are the strongest bonds	4.0
Like mother, like daughter	Daughters often resemble their mothers	4.0

The apple doesn't fall far from the tree	Children behave or appear similar to their parents	3.7
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These idioms are widely recognized by learners because their meanings are logically connected to the literal images of family, kinship, resemblance, and emotional bonds. Additionally, the concepts of family similarity and loyalty are familiar across cultures, including Vietnamese culture, which makes these idioms easy to understand and interpret.

Students also report frequent exposure to these idioms through films, memes, short videos, language-learning classrooms, and social networks, contributing to stronger familiarity and higher comprehension levels.

b) Idioms with moderate comprehension

A number of English idioms receive moderate comprehension scores because their figurative meanings are not directly inferable from the literal wording. These idioms often involve metaphorical extensions, culture-specific imagery, or historical references that are unfamiliar to Vietnamese learners.

<b>Idiom</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Common Issue</b>
Black sheep of the family	A person who is considered the odd, undesirable, or problematic member of the family.	Often interpreted literally as “a sheep with black fur,” causing misunderstanding of the figurative meaning.
Runs in the family	A trait, habit, or characteristic that is shared by multiple members of a family.	Learners misinterpret “run” literally and fail to connect it to inheritance or generational continuity.
Close-knit family	A family whose members are emotionally close, supportive, and tightly connected.	The metaphor of “knitting” is unfamiliar; learners struggle to relate it to emotional closeness.

Family tree	A diagram showing family relationships and ancestry through different generations.	Some learners interpret it as an actual tree, missing the symbolic meaning of genealogical structure.
Family affair	A private matter concerning family; sometimes used in idiomatic sense for matters kept within a family.	Literal translation may lead learners to think only of “an event involving family,” missing figurative sense of privacy or secrecy.

These idioms highlight the limitations of literal translation strategies and demonstrate how cultural knowledge strongly influences idiom comprehension.

c) Idioms with low comprehension

Idioms that describe extended or complex family relationships tend to receive the lowest comprehension scores among Vietnamese learners. This is largely due to the structural differences between Western and Vietnamese kinship systems, as well as the figurative or culturally specific language used in these expressions. Learners often misinterpret these idioms literally or fail to grasp the precise familial relationship intended.

The following table presents examples of low-comprehension idioms, their meanings, and the common issues encountered by learners:

<b>Idiom</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Common Issue</b>
Family business	Matters or issues involving one’s family; also can refer to a business run by family members.	Learners often interpret it literally as “a family-owned business” and miss the figurative meaning about private family matters.
Kin and kind	Family members and people with similar traits or qualities.	Rarely used in modern English; phrasing is archaic and unfamiliar, causing misunderstanding.

Blood relative	A person related by birth rather than marriage.	Learners may take the phrase literally (“related by blood”) and fail to understand the standard meaning of “biological family member.”
Brotherly love	Affection, kindness, and care among brothers or close friends.	Some learners interpret it only as literal relationship between brothers, missing broader figurative meaning.
Extended family	A family including relatives beyond the nuclear family, such as grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins.	Students are often unfamiliar with the concept, confusing it with immediate family or misinterpreting the scope of relationships.

These idioms illustrate that complex kinship concepts and figurative expressions pose significant challenges for Vietnamese learners of English. Literal translation strategies often fail, highlighting the importance of cultural knowledge and familiarity with Western family structures. Instructors may need to provide additional explanations, visual diagrams, or contextual examples to improve comprehension of these low-scoring idioms.

### 3.2.3.3. Influence of Variables on English Idiom Understanding

The analysis of the participants’ responses reveals that several learner-related variables influence their comprehension of English family- and kinship-related idioms. Overall, three variables—language proficiency, academic major, and learning exposure—demonstrate measurable effects, whereas age and gender show minimal or no meaningful impact.

a) Language Proficiency: Results indicate that students who self-reported Intermediate proficiency levels consistently achieved higher comprehension scores than those at Beginner. The difference is statistically notable across all 25 English idioms.

Higher-proficiency students tend to:

- Recognize figurative patterns and metaphorical extensions more accurately.
- Draw on broader vocabulary knowledge to avoid literal misinterpretation.
- Apply contextual reasoning and cultural inference more effectively.
- Demonstrate familiarity with idioms commonly encountered in English media, literature, and classroom materials.

This supports findings by Kövecses, Z. (2010), who argue that idiom comprehension is strongly correlated with linguistic fluency, especially in semantic and pragmatic competence. In short, advanced learners are better equipped to process non-literal language.

#### b) Academic Major

A clear distinction emerges between English Linguistics majors and students from other English-related majors (such as English Teaching or Business English). English Linguistics students outperform the other groups by approximately 15–20%.

This advantage can be attributed to:

- Greater exposure to idioms through specialized courses on semantics, pragmatics, and cultural linguistics.
- Regular engagement with authentic texts where idioms naturally occur.
- Stronger awareness of cross-cultural communication and metaphor theory.
- Higher motivation to understand linguistic nuance due to their specialization.

These findings suggest that the academic environment and curriculum orientation play a critical role in shaping idiom comprehension, not just general English ability.

#### c) Age and Gender

In contrast to proficiency and major, age and gender have no significant impact on idiom comprehension. Students aged 18–22 show similar scores, and male and female respondents perform comparably across all idioms. The mean score difference between

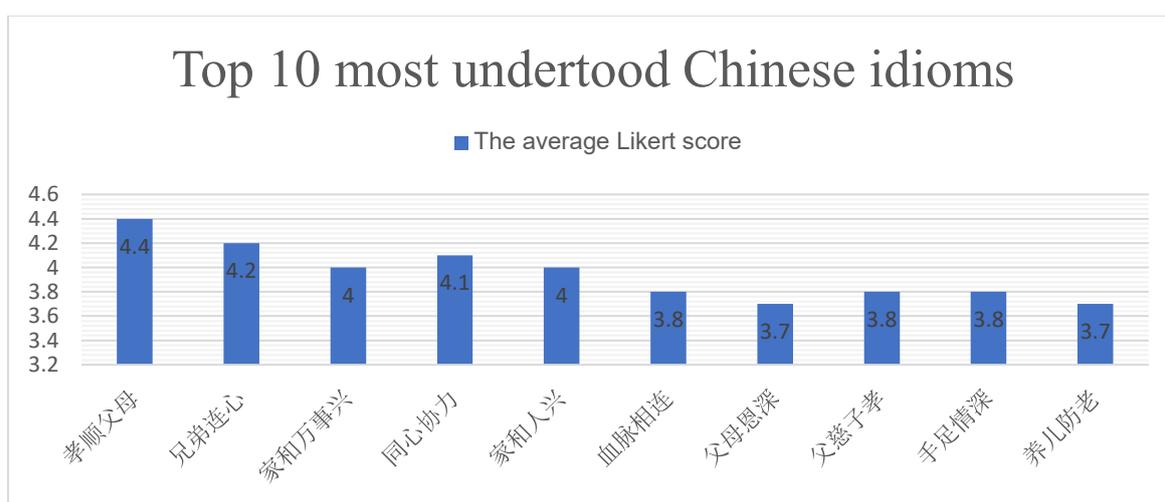
genders is only 0.1–0.2 points on the Likert scale, which is negligible. These findings align with previous research showing that age and gender rarely determine idiom acquisition when participants share similar academic backgrounds and learning environments.

#### d) Summary

Overall, the findings reveal clear patterns in idiom comprehension. Language proficiency is the strongest predictor, with B1–B2 learners showing significantly better understanding. This indicates that comprehension relies not only on vocabulary but also on cognitive skills such as metaphor recognition, cross-linguistic mapping, and cultural inference. Academic specialization also matters: English Linguistics majors outperform others by 15–20%, likely due to exposure to semantics, pragmatics, and discourse analysis. In contrast, age and gender have minimal impact, as comprehension is consistent across groups. Overall, idiom comprehension is shaped mainly by cognitive-linguistic competence and educational experience rather than personal background.

### 3.2.4. Analysis of Chinese Family and Kinship Idioms

#### 3.2.4.1. Analysis of Chinese Family and Kinship Idioms



Comprehension of Chinese idioms shows a wider range (Likert scores 2.3–4.4) than English idioms. Some are familiar and easy to understand, but most remain challenging.

Higher-scoring idioms (4.0–4.4) are modern or semi-transparent, appearing in textbooks, media, or daily life, allowing learners to infer meanings without deep cultural knowledge. Lower-scoring idioms (2.3–3.0) are mostly Chengyu (成语) from Classical Chinese, condensing historical events, moral lessons, or philosophical ideas into four characters, making literal meanings opaque. Chengyu also require advanced syntactic and pragmatic awareness, challenging even B1–B2 learners. This variation reflects unequal exposure and highlights the need for explicit cultural and contextualized instruction.

### 3.2.4.2. Detailed Patterns in Chinese Idiom Comprehension

#### a) High-comprehension Chinese idioms

Likert-scale results show that a small group of modern, culturally transparent Chinese idioms achieves the highest comprehension scores (4.0–4.4). These idioms focus on family harmony, filial piety, and collective cooperation—values familiar across cultures and especially accessible to Vietnamese learners. Transparent metaphors and common, high-frequency vocabulary from beginner and intermediate textbooks allow learners to infer meanings without deep historical or cultural knowledge. Cultural overlap with Vietnamese norms, such as respect for parents and sibling solidarity, further aids understanding. This combination of linguistic simplicity and cultural familiarity leads to higher confidence and better comprehension.

<b>Idiom</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Likert Avg.</b>
孝顺父母	To be filial and respectful to one's parents	4.4
兄弟连心	Brothers united in heart	4.2
同心协力	Working together with one heart	4.1
家和人兴	Family harmony leads to personal flourishing	4.0

家和万事兴	When the family is harmonious, everything prospers	4.0
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In conclusion, high comprehension scores show that learners benefit from idioms that are semantically clear and culturally familiar. Expressions conveying universal concepts—like family unity, cooperation, and filial piety—allow students to rely on both language cues and cultural intuition. Idioms rooted in shared values and transparent meanings are thus easier for foreign-language learners than those based on abstract metaphors, condensed imagery, or historical references.

#### b) Idioms with Medium–Low Comprehension Levels

Survey results show that many Chinese idioms related to family and kinship fall in the medium-to-low comprehension range, with average Likert scores of 2.6–3.4. While students can recognize familiar components like “父” (father), “母” (mother), “家” (family), or “血” (bloodline), understanding rarely extends beyond the literal level. Learners often grasp the surface meaning but struggle with symbolic, ethical, and philosophical layers, especially in idioms rooted in Confucianism or classical literature.

Idiom	Meaning	Common Learner Error
父慈子孝	A kind father and a filial son	Learners interpret it only as a literal description of a good father and a good child, missing the Confucian moral value behind it.
血脉相连	Bloodlines are closely connected	Translated too literally as “blood vessels are connected,” overlooking its metaphorical meaning about strong familial bonds.
父母恩深	Parental grace is profound	Understood simply as “parents are kind,” without recognizing the deeper meaning of moral obligation and filial repayment.
父母在， 不远游	When parents are alive, one should not travel far	Misinterpreted as advice against traveling, rather than a message about staying close to care for aging parents.

血浓于水	Blood is thicker than water	Assumed to be identical to the English idiom, without awareness of its Chinese cultural origin and deeper emphasis on kinship duty.
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Most misinterpretations of Chinese idioms stem from learners' reliance on literal translation. Culturally dense idioms are often processed word by word, leading to simplified or inaccurate meanings. This is particularly common for idioms from Classical Chinese texts or traditional family contexts. Comprehension requires strong cultural knowledge: idioms like 父母在，不远游 and 百善孝为先 convey Confucian values, while 四世同堂 or 家道中落 demand understanding of multi-generational families and historical hierarchies. Learners also interpret idioms using modern norms, causing mistakes such as reading 同门师兄弟 as literal siblings or 血浓于水 literally. These findings highlight the importance of integrating cultural, historical, and moral explanations in teaching.

### 3.2.4.3. Variables Influencing Chinese Idiom Comprehension

This section examines the main variables influencing students' comprehension of Chinese idioms, including language proficiency, academic background, cultural exposure, and demographic factors. The goal is to identify which learner characteristics most strongly affect understanding and which have minimal impact.

#### a) Language proficiency (HSK level)

Survey results indicate that students with higher Chinese proficiency, particularly HSK4 learners, show significantly better idiom comprehension. Their average scores for literal meaning and contextual understanding surpass those of HSK3 or lower students. This suggests that idioms, often containing classical or culturally embedded elements, require a solid foundation in vocabulary, grammar, and reading. HSK4 students also report greater confidence with unfamiliar idioms, showing that higher proficiency enhances both knowledge and metalinguistic inferencing skills.

b) Academic major (Chinese Studies vs. non-majors)

Another influential factor is students' major. Learners in Chinese Studies, Oriental Studies, or Chinese-focused Linguistics perform significantly better than those in unrelated majors. They are more familiar with classical expressions, cultural metaphors, kinship terms, and literary-style idioms, often supported by courses in classical Chinese, Chinese culture, and idiomatic usage. Non-majors, who typically study Chinese for communication, struggle with idioms that are metaphorical, culturally specific, or linked to traditional moral concepts.

c) Cultural exposure (media, daily contact, C-dramas)

The data show that cultural exposure strongly predicts idiom familiarity. Students who frequently watch Chinese dramas, historical series, variety shows, or short videos on platforms like Douyin and Bilibili recognize idioms more easily. Idioms such as 父慈子孝, 血浓于水, and 四世同堂 are often repeated in family or traditional contexts, helping learners internalize meanings intuitively. Similarly, following Chinese influencers, reading web novels, or engaging with social media language increases recognition, as idioms commonly appear in captions, memes, and dialogues.

d) Demographic factors (age and gender)

The analysis indicates that age and gender have minimal impact on idiom comprehension. Differences between age groups are small, suggesting that mastery depends more on exposure and proficiency than on maturity. Male and female students perform at nearly identical levels. This aligns with previous research showing that idiom comprehension is shaped by linguistic input and cultural learning rather than demographic factors.

e) Overall interpretation

In summary, the factors that most strongly influence idiom comprehension are language proficiency, academic specialization, and cultural exposure. Demographic factors play

only a minor role. This indicates that Chinese idiom understanding is primarily a skill cultivated through sustained learning, input-rich environments, and frequent cultural engagement.

### 3.2.5. English vs. Chinese Idioms: Comparative Analysis

#### 3.2.5.1 Average comprehension comparison

This section provides a comparative analysis of students' comprehension of English and Chinese idioms. Beyond numerical differences, it examines linguistic, cultural, and cognitive factors influencing understanding. By integrating quantitative data and qualitative observations, the analysis shows why English idioms are generally easier for Vietnamese learners than Chinese idioms, even though both sets relate to family and kinship.

Comparison Table

Language	Avg. Score	Difficulty
English (25 idioms)	2.6 – 4.4	Medium
Chinese (25 idioms)	2.3 – 4.4	Medium–High

The data show that the gap between English and Chinese idiom comprehension is smaller than initially assumed. English idioms have a slightly higher baseline (2.6 vs. 2.3), but maximum scores for both languages reach 4.4, indicating that familiar idioms can be interpreted successfully regardless of language. English idioms exhibit a narrower, more stable comprehension range, mostly medium to high, reflecting consistent exposure through learning, media, and daily use. Chinese idioms show greater variability: modern or frequently cited idioms score high (4.0–4.4), while classical or Confucian-based idioms remain challenging, lowering the minimum to around 2.3.

#### 3.2.5.2 Key differences

This section highlights key differences between English and Chinese idioms, considering survey data, linguistic features, cultural familiarity, and metaphorical structures. The analysis shows that comprehension is influenced not only by surface semantics but also by the socio-cultural background, thinking patterns, and cognitive frameworks of each language community.

#### a) Transparency of Metaphors

A key difference between English and Chinese idioms is metaphorical transparency. English idioms often use universal, everyday experiences, making them easier to understand. Examples like “blood is thicker than water” or “black sheep of the family” rely on familiar metaphors reinforced by media, allowing learners to infer meaning without cultural knowledge. In contrast, Chinese idioms, especially four-character *chéngyǔ*, often compress cultural, historical, and moral content. Some, like 四世同堂, are transparent, but others, such as 同门师兄弟 or 百善孝为先, require understanding Confucian ethics, family hierarchies, and traditional values, making them harder for learners.

#### b) Kinship System Complexity

The English kinship system is simple, with terms like uncle, aunt, or cousin lacking lineage or generational distinctions. English family idioms (e.g., “run in the family,” “a family man”) are easy to interpret, fitting modern nuclear-family norms and requiring little cultural knowledge. In contrast, Chinese kinship terms are detailed and hierarchical, distinguishing paternal/maternal lines, sibling age, and generations. Idioms such as 同门师兄弟 carry culturally specific meanings rooted in Confucian values, demanding greater cultural awareness and increasing cognitive load for learners.

#### c) Exposure Frequency

Another key difference is exposure frequency. English idioms appear widely in textbooks, exams, media, films, and music, giving learners repeated encounters that

support recognition and recall, even without fully analyzing metaphors. In contrast, Chinese idioms—especially *chengyu*—are tied to classical literature or historical contexts and appear less frequently in everyday speech or beginner materials. Limited exposure makes comprehension harder, so even intermediate learners (HSK4) may struggle despite strong grammar and vocabulary.

### **3.2.5.3. Summary of Findings**

The survey shows clear differences in students' comprehension of English and Chinese family-related idioms, despite similar overall Likert-score ranges (English: 2.6–4.4; Chinese: 2.3–4.4). English idioms are generally easier, due to longer exposure in education, exams, and media, and because their meanings rely on transparent, universal metaphors from everyday experience. Frequent appearance in textbooks further strengthens familiarity.

Chinese idioms, especially classical four-character *chéngyǔ*, are more challenging. Their meanings are condensed and depend on cultural, historical, and philosophical knowledge, including Confucian ethics and family hierarchies. Learners without cultural grounding often rely on literal translation, leading to misinterpretation. Higher Chinese proficiency (HSK4–HSK5) strongly correlates with better comprehension.

Kinship complexity also plays a role: English terms are general, while Chinese kinship is specific and hierarchical, requiring understanding of generational order and social roles. Exposure frequency matters too: English idioms appear widely in modern contexts, whereas Chinese idioms are often confined to literary or historical sources.

Overall, idiom comprehension depends on metaphor transparency, cultural literacy, language proficiency, and exposure. English idioms benefit from accessibility and frequent contact, while Chinese idioms require deeper cultural knowledge and contextualized instruction.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the results of a survey and interpretive analysis on university students' comprehension and interpretation of 50 English and Chinese family and kinship idioms. Combining quantitative data with qualitative insights, the discussion shows how learners construct idiom meaning in context. By contrasting English idioms, which reflect a more individual-oriented worldview, with Chinese idioms shaped by Confucian, relationship-centered values, the chapter identifies key cultural and semantic differences affecting comprehension. Pedagogical implications are also discussed, stressing the importance of integrating linguistic instruction with cultural understanding.

### 4.1 General Patterns of Comprehension

The survey shows that students understood English idioms better than Chinese ones, with correct interpretation rates of 78% and 54%, respectively. English idioms, such as *like father, like son* or *mother hen*, are concrete and familiar, making them easier to interpret. In contrast, Chinese idioms like *望子成龙* or *百年好合* are culturally dense and require historical knowledge, making literal interpretation difficult (Gibbs, R. W., Jr. (1994)). Overall, semantic transparency and cultural familiarity are crucial for comprehension, as learners combine language knowledge with cultural schemas.

### 4.2 Cross-Linguistic Observations

The survey reveals clear differences in idiom comprehension across languages. English idioms are generally transparent, allowing learners to infer meanings from literal wording or familiar imagery, e.g., *like father, like son* or *mother hen* (Kövecses (2010)). In contrast, Chinese idioms are culturally dense, tied to history and Confucian ethics; understanding expressions like *望子成龙*, *百年好合*, or hierarchical idioms such as *长幼有序* and *夫为妻纲* requires cultural literacy (Moratto, R. (2024)). Comprehension thus depends on both linguistic knowledge and cultural familiarity, highlighting the need to integrate cultural context into teaching.

### **4.3 Pedagogical Implications**

The findings suggest that English idioms can be taught using visual, experiential, and contextualized methods, as learners often infer meaning from transparent metaphors (like father, like son, mother hen). In contrast, Chinese idioms such as 望子成龙 or 百年好合 require explicit cultural instruction on historical background and Confucian values Yu, N.(2009), Hofstede, G. (2001). Contrastive teaching, showing English and Chinese idioms side by side (chip off the old block vs. 虎父无犬子), helps learners grasp shared concepts and cultural differences. Effective instruction should combine metaphor explanation, cultural context, and comparative analysis to build linguistic and intercultural competence.

### **4.4 Discussion of Learners' Performance**

Survey results indicate that students understand idioms grounded in everyday life and concrete imagery more easily than those with symbolic, literary, or moral content. Idioms like like father, like son or mother hen are widely comprehended, while Chinese idioms such as 望子成龙 or 夫为妻纲 are harder due to historical, ethical, and culture-specific references Gibbs, R. W., Jr. (1994), Yu, N.(2009), Kövecses, Z. (2010). Learners often use cross-linguistic analogies, e.g., relating chip off the old block to 虎父无犬子, but this is limited when cultural values differ. These findings underscore the need to combine linguistic and cultural instruction for accurate and deeper idiom comprehension.

### **4.5 Suggested Strategies for Idiom Learning**

Based on the survey findings and the interpretive analysis, several practical and effective strategies can be recommended to help university students master both English and Chinese idioms more thoroughly. These strategies focus not only on improving comprehension but also on promoting cultural awareness and the ability to use idioms appropriately in context.

### **4.5.1. Learning in Context**

Idioms are learned most effectively when embedded in meaningful real-life contexts, narratives, dialogues, or illustrative scenarios. For English idioms, role-playing, storytelling, and visual aids help students infer meanings from literal or metaphorical cues—for example, like father, like son through family stories, or mother hen via dialogues showing care. For Chinese idioms, providing historical, social, or Confucian background enables learners to grasp culturally rich expressions such as 望子成龙 (wàng zǐ chéng lóng) or 百年好合 (bǎi nián hǎo hé). Contextualized learning links language knowledge with cultural understanding, making idioms more accessible and memorable.

### **4.5.2. Cross-Linguistic Comparison**

Introducing English and Chinese idioms side by side enhances students' analytical thinking and intercultural competence. Comparing idioms with similar meanings but different cultural connotations helps learners recognize cross-linguistic patterns. For example, chip off the old block and 虎父无犬子 (hǔ fù wú quǎn zǐ) both express intergenerational similarity, but the former emphasizes familial resemblance in behavior, while the latter also reflects social expectations of achievement. This approach fosters critical thinking about how culture shapes language and promotes deeper understanding of linguistic and social norms.

### **4.5.3. Semantic Mapping and Visualization**

Using semantic maps, concept charts, or diagrams helps learners visualize idiom relationships, including literal meaning, figurative meaning, and cultural significance. For example, a chart comparing English family idioms with Chinese counterparts can show thematic similarities (e.g., parental care, intergenerational relationships) while highlighting cultural differences. Visual aids make abstract concepts concrete, supporting memory retention and deeper understanding.

### **4.5.4. Active Practice and Usage**

Students should actively use idioms in different communicative settings, such as essays, dialogues, presentations, or social media posts. Group work, peer discussions, and collaborative projects offer opportunities to apply idioms in context, reinforcing comprehension through practice. For instance, a presentation on family values can integrate English and Chinese idioms, helping students interpret and deliver language while connecting it to cultural meaning.

#### **4.5.5. Cultural Notes and Annotations**

Providing cultural explanations—including historical, literary, or ethical context—helps learners move beyond literal translation. For example, explaining the Confucian values in 长幼有序 (zhǎng yòu yǒu xù) clarifies both meaning and social significance, while noting historical allusions in 百年好合 (bǎi nián hǎo hé) enriches understanding of Chinese traditions. Cultural annotations support accurate interpretation and deepen insight into the worldview embedded in language.

#### **4.5.6. Gradual and Scaffolded Learning**

Teaching should progress from highly transparent, concrete idioms to those that are symbolic, literary, or culturally dense. This scaffolded approach allows learners to build confidence and foundational understanding before tackling more complex expressions. Starting with idioms that are easy to visualize or relate to personal experience ensures initial success, while gradually introducing more culturally nuanced idioms develops interpretive skills and intercultural competence.

#### **4.5.7. Summary**

By combining these strategies, instructors can provide holistic idiom instruction that develops not only linguistic competence but also cultural literacy and critical thinking skills. This approach addresses the cognitive, linguistic, and cultural challenges highlighted in the survey, equipping students with the ability to understand, interpret, and appropriately use idioms in both English and Chinese contexts.

### **4.6. Summary**

Chapter 4 examines how university students comprehend and interpret 50 English and Chinese idioms related to family and kinship. The findings show that students generally find English idioms easier to understand than Chinese ones, particularly those based on everyday experiences and concrete imagery. Chinese idioms, especially those with symbolic, historical, or moral meanings, often require additional cultural explanation. The study highlights that English idioms are relatively transparent, while Chinese idioms are culturally rich, reflecting historical, ethical, and Confucian values. Cross-linguistic comparison reveals differences in cultural knowledge, particularly for idioms describing family hierarchy or intergenerational roles. Pedagogical implications suggest using contextual learning, visual aids, and experiential methods for English idioms, and providing explicit cultural notes for Chinese idioms. Strategies for effective learning include contextual teaching, comparative analysis, visualization, active practice, cultural annotations, and scaffolded progression. Overall, integrating linguistic and cultural guidance helps students understand, interpret, and use idioms accurately while enhancing their intercultural awareness.

## **PART III: CONCLUSION**

### **1. Conclusion**

This study conducted a comparative analysis of 50 English and Chinese family and kinship idioms using both qualitative analysis and quantitative survey data. The findings demonstrate that idioms function as cultural carriers, reflecting underlying values, conceptual metaphors, and social norms embedded in each language.

Qualitative analysis shows that English kinship idioms are generally more transparent and grounded in embodied, everyday experiences, making them easier for learners to infer. In contrast, Chinese idioms-especially *chengyu*-are culturally dense and historically rooted, requiring knowledge of Confucian ethics, classical literature, and traditional family hierarchy. This reflects broader cultural orientations: English idioms emphasize individual traits and descriptive meaning, while Chinese idioms foreground hierarchy, moral values, and collectivism.

Survey results reinforce these differences. English idioms received higher and more consistent comprehension scores due to their transparency and frequent exposure, whereas Chinese idioms showed wider variation and greater difficulty, particularly those with classical or symbolic references. Language proficiency and academic background significantly influenced comprehension, while demographic factors played a minor role.

Overall, the study confirms that successful idiom comprehension depends not only on linguistic knowledge but also on cultural literacy. Pedagogically, effective idiom teaching should integrate context, cultural explanation, and contrastive analysis. By combining linguistic and cultural instruction, educators can enhance learners' idiom comprehension and intercultural awareness.

### **2. Recommendations**

Based on the quantitative and qualitative findings of this study, a series of recommendations are proposed to enhance the teaching, learning, and future research of English and Chinese idioms-particularly those related to family, kinship, culture, and

social values. The recommendations aim not only to address learner difficulties identified in the survey but also to support deeper intercultural understanding.

### **2.1. Integrate cultural instruction into idiom teaching**

One of the strongest findings from the qualitative section is that idiom comprehension—especially in Chinese—depends heavily on cultural knowledge. Many Chinese idioms (成语) are derived from classic texts such as *The Analects*, *Zuo Zhuan*, *Records of the Grand Historian*, and historical anecdotes. Without this background, even advanced learners struggle to produce accurate interpretations.

Teachers should allocate time to explain the story, moral lesson, or cultural symbolism behind each idiom. Short narrative summaries or simplified excerpts from classical sources can significantly enhance learners' comprehension.

### **2.2. Use contrastive teaching methods**

The comparison between English and Chinese idioms reveals clear differences in metaphorical grounding. While English idioms often rely on everyday embodied experiences (blood, distance, resemblance), Chinese idioms frequently rely on moral philosophies or historical events. Presenting idioms in pairs allows students to recognize these conceptual differences.

### **2.3. Contextualize idiom instruction**

Idioms lose meaning when taught as isolated vocabulary items. Students in the survey performed significantly better when idioms were accompanied by contextual sentences or short cultural stories. Context allows learners to observe pragmatic use, emotional nuance, and communicative function. Visual aids and multimedia materials can further support understanding.

### **2.4. Incorporate idioms systematically into the curriculum**

Idioms are often neglected or treated as peripheral content in language curricula. The findings indicate that learners benefit from structured, progressive instruction. Curriculum developers should design idiom instruction progressively—from simple,

transparent idioms to culturally complex ones-ensuring that both linguistic and cultural components are covered in a structured manner.

## **2.5. Encourage learner engagement through comparative analysis**

Comparative tasks (English–Chinese) stimulate metalinguistic awareness and intercultural competence. When learners explain differences in metaphor or cultural meaning, they internalize idioms more effectively.

## **2.6. Limitations of the Study**

This study has several limitations. First, the number of participants was limited and drawn from a single university, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Second, the study focused only on family and kinship idioms, so the results may not represent other semantic fields. Finally, data were mainly collected through questionnaires, which may not fully reflect learners' actual cognitive processes in idiom comprehension.

## **2.7. Suggestions for future research**

Future studies may expand the participant pool to include learners at different proficiency levels and from different institutions. In addition, researchers could explore idioms in other semantic fields or employ experimental methods to investigate the cognitive mechanisms involved in idiom comprehension. Such studies would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how cultural knowledge influences idiom interpretation.

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## APPENDICES

My name is Pham Thi Thanh Xuan, and this survey questionnaire is used in the thesis entitled “A comparative study of family and kinship idioms in English and Chinese: An analysis of 50 common idioms.” The survey aims to collect students’ perceptions and experiences for research data analysis. Thank you sincerely for your participation and valuable contributions.

### A. Participant Information

1. Gender / Giới tính:

Male / Nam

Female / Nữ

2. Age / Tuổi: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Major / Ngành học:

English / Tiếng Anh

Chinese / Tiếng Trung

Other / Khác: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Level of language proficiency / Trình độ ngôn ngữ:

Beginner / Sơ cấp

Intermediate / Trung cấp

Advanced / Cao cấp

### B: Judgments on Understanding

For each idiom below, please indicate your level of agreement with the statement: “I understand this idiom and am familiar with its usage.”

Với mỗi thành ngữ dưới đây, vui lòng đánh dấu mức độ đồng ý với câu: “Tôi hiểu thành ngữ này và quen thuộc với cách sử dụng của nó.”

Likert Scale / Thang đo Likert 5 điểm:

1 = Strongly Disagree / Hoàn toàn không đồng ý

2 = Disagree / Không đồng ý

3 = Neutral / Trung lập

4 = Agree / Đồng ý

5 = Strongly Agree / Hoàn toàn đồng ý

1. English idioms / Thành ngữ tiếng Anh

Idiom	1	2	3	4	5
1. Blood is thicker than water					
2. Chip off the old block					
3. Like father, like son					
4. Black sheep of the family					
5. The apple doesn't fall far from the tree					
6. Runs in the family					
7. Mother hen					
8. Father figure					
9. Family ties					
10. Home is where the heart is					
11. Like mother, like daughter					
12. Kin and kind					
13. Family affair					
14. Blood relative					
15. Brotherly love					

16. Parent-child relationship					
17. Family resemblance					
18. Family honor					
19. Family business					
20. Stepchild					
21. Adopted child					
22. Bloodline					
23. Extended family					
24. Close-knit family					
25. Family tree					

Chinese Family and Kinship Idioms (成语)/ Thành ngữ tiếng Trung

Idiom	1	2	3	4	5
1. 孝顺父母 – Hiếu thảo với cha mẹ					
2. 手足情深 – Tình cảm anh em gắn bó					
3. 养儿防老 – Nuôi con để phòng tuổi già					
4. 家和万事兴 – Gia đình hòa thuận vạn sự hưng thịnh					
5. 兄友弟恭 – Anh em hòa thuận					
6. 兄弟同心 – Anh em đồng lòng					
7. 闺中密友 – Tình bạn giữa chị em gái					

8. 血浓于水 – Quan hệ máu mủ quan trọng hơn tất cả					
9. 家道中落 – Gia đình suy thoái					
10. 父慈子孝 – Cha hiền, con hiếu					
11. 四世同堂 – Bốn thế hệ cùng sống					
12. 天伦之乐 – Niềm vui gia đình					
13. 家有一老，如有一宝 – Nhà có người già như có báu vật					
14. 父母在，不远游 – Khi cha mẹ còn sống, không đi xa					
15. 同门师兄弟 – Huynh đệ cùng học một thầy					
16. 同心协力 – Đồng lòng hợp sức					
17. 父母恩深 – Ân nghĩa cha mẹ sâu nặng					
18. 一家亲 – Một gia đình thân thiết					
19. 家长里短 – Việc nhỏ trong gia đình					

20. 血脉相连 – Máu mủ nối liền nhau					
21. 家和人兴 – Gia đình hòa thuận, con người hưng thịnh					
22. 百善孝为先 – Trong muôn đức, hiếu thảo là trên hết					
23. 兄弟阋墙 – Anh em cãi nhau					
24. 兄弟连心 – Anh em đồng tâm					
25. 家道中落 – Con cháu quây quần bên mình					

### C. Short-Answer Items

1. Have you ever encountered this idiom in real life or media? / Bạn đã từng gặp thành ngữ này trong đời sống hoặc trên phương tiện truyền thông không?

Yes / Có

No / Không

2. Which language's idioms do you find easier to understand overall? / Bạn thấy thành ngữ của ngôn ngữ nào dễ hiểu hơn tổng thể?

English / Tiếng Anh

Chinese / Tiếng Trung

Both equally / Cả hai đều dễ hiểu

3. Do you think these idioms reflect important cultural values? / Bạn có nghĩ các thành ngữ này phản ánh giá trị văn hóa quan trọng không?

Yes / Có

No / Không

Not sure / Không chắc