Changing Patterns of Public Speaking Class Anxiety among Chinese International Undergraduates in Malaysian Public University

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Abstract
English speaking anxiety is a common problem among students in Mainland China due to its exam-oriented education system, which remains prevalent among most Chinese international students (CISs) around the world. However, very few research studies on speaking issues among undergraduate CISs in Malaysia are conducted. In tertiary education, public speaking class anxiety (PSCA) is deeply related with academic achievement. Hence, this study investigated the common levels of PSCA among Chinese international undergraduates (CIUs) in a Malaysian public university, besides discovering the ranges of PSCA between English and non-English majors,and exploring the changing patterns of PSCA during their 4-year study. Data was collected from 36 CIUs in the university through the questionnaire named: Public Speaking Class Anxiety Scale (PSCAS). Descriptive analysis and independent t-test were used for data analysis. The results indicate that most CIUs experienced a medium level of PSCA, besides there is a significant difference of PSCA between English and non-English and a downward trend of PSCA took place in the 4-year study. This study may fill the scarce literature on CIUs' PSCA in Malaysia and provide academic support for future research on PSCA.
Keywords: Chinese International Students, English as a Foreign Language, Foreign language anxiety, Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety, Public Speaking Class Anxiety Scale, Speaking Anxiety

Introduction
Malaysia, which aspires to be a global education hub, aims to attract 250,000 international students by 2025 (MOE of Malaysia, 2015). Among international students, Chinese international students (CISs) make up the largest group in Malaysia by 2020 (UNESCO, 2022). This number has continuously increased since 2021 (EMGS, 2022). Unlike Malaysia, students in China are driven to obtain good scores for examinations as a promise for better quality of education. English, as a required subject of the examination at all levels of education, is considered as a "booster" ofthe total scores (Zhang & Beck, 2017). Without a doubt, English

is thus viewed to be instrumental at boosting students' overall exam scores (Zhang & Beck, 2017; Liu & Hong, 2021). However, in an exam-oriented system such as China, speaking Englishis considered as irrelevant in all levels for English proficiency tests, including those offered at the university level: College English Test Band 4/6 (CET 4/6) (Zhang & Beck, 2017; Zheng & Cheng, 2018). The ideology of exam supremacy seems to lead the public to disregard English-speaking training, resorting to the prevalence of traditional English teaching and learning in China (Liu & Hong, 2021). Textual ability
is valued more than spoken language, and the most common practices are rote-memorizing, copying textbooks, and dictation (Weng, 2018; Zhang & Beck,2017; Zheng & Cheng, 2018).

The situation could be even graver. To elaborate more, the willingness of English as a second language (ESL) learners to communicate greatly depends on the teacher's teaching style (Chen et al., 2021). Yet, it is not difficult to assume that this communicative intention is largely hindered by traditional teaching style. Grade 6 and 9 students have shown an increase in speaking anxiety mainly due to highexpectations in the Junior and Senior Middle School Entrance Exam (Liu & Hong,2021), which continue to high school level when students sit for the National CollegeEntrance Examination (Zhang & Beck, 2017). As a result, Chinese university studentsperceive themselves as experienced exam-takers, where exams do not pose any moreanxiety except those that concern English-speaking tests (Zheng & Cheng, 2018). Infact, there are reports of continued anxiety among Master students (Malik et a., 2020).

The absence of English-speaking practice in Chinese education causes anxiety among Chinese students when speaking in public (Naudhani et al., 2018). In tertiary education, Chinese undergraduates find speaking English in public as the most nerve-wracking situation that contributes to foreign language anxiety (FLA), which is also experienced by postgraduates (Jiang & Dewaele, 2020; Malik et al., 2020).Speaking anxiety does not only exist in China, but also among CISs, especially those who are transiting into English-speaking countries (Heng, 2019; Zhai & Razali, 2022). Low English-speaking proficiency hinders effective engagement among CISs with their professional and personal lives abroad (Alharbi & Smith, 2018). In fact, CISs in the United States are reported to lack classroom participation when doing group discussions and presentations due to the fear of communication (Ching, 2017).

Since higher education institutions (HEIs) in Malaysia do not oblige their students with such high expectations, CISs' speaking anxiety exists to a certain level. It was reported that 200 pre-university CISs in intensive English courses revealed thatcommunication apprehension was the greatest source of FLA (Fei & Shabdin, 2019). Possible reasons for this situation can be traced to the way speaking and its teaching are relatively ignored in English classrooms in China (Zhai & Razali, 2022). While there are already existing attempts to enhance verbal communication skills via numerous innovations (e.g. Mokhtar et al., 2019; Nur Fitri Asih & Ellianawati, 2019; Ejeng & Hashim, 2020; Raman et al., 2023), very little attention is given to investigate the level of speaking anxiety among Chinese international undergraduates (CIUs), especially those on public speaking class anxiety (PSCA). PSCA is themediation on students' academic achievement due to its significant influence onoverall speaking performance, which is a solid component of academic evaluation asit is required in the oral exams, in-

class presentations, and class discussions (Alharbi& Smith, 2018; Ali et al 2021). Therefore, the issues of PSCA should be given focus, especially among CIUs in Malaysia. As such, this research asks three questions: (1) What is the majority level of PSCA among CIUs in UKM?, (2) What is the differenceof PSCA between English and non-English CIUs? and (3) What is the changing pattern of PSCA during the 4 years of study?

Literature Review
Foreign Language Anxiety in the Classroom
In foreign language learning process, learners may experience uncomfortable feelings (i.e. anxiety, fear, apprehension) when they are required to apply second or
third language skills (listen, speak, read, write) in the classroom (Horwitz et al., 1986). To measure the level of FLA in the classroom, the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) was developed (Horwitz et al 1986), which considers FLA as a constitution of 3 elements: communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. Students who face communication anxiety aremainly shy or have fear of communicating with others (either at individual, groups or in public). Those who face test anxiety, consider every presentation in a foreign language class as a test, which is demanding on themselves, and dread failure in tests. Students, who are afraid of negative evaluation, are worried about others' adverse comments and consider them as threats to their self-images.

Public Speaking Anxiety in the Classroom
Public speaking anxiety (PSA) is a typical feature of communication apprehension, which is construed as a feeling of fear or worry to speak in front of a group of people. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms in China,speaking English in public and in front of a classroom are major anxiety-provoking situations (Jiang & Dewaele, 2020, Naudhani et al., 2018). Yet, students are likely to learn better when they have lower anxiety to communicate in the classroom (Fei & Shabdin 2019). Hence, to enhance students' English learning, PSA in the classroom isa crucial issue that calls upon public acknowledgement and mutual efforts to mitigate the problem.
FLCAS is commonly applied in most studies (Sutarsyah, 2017; Malik et al., 2020; Naudhani et al., 2018; Zheng & Cheng, 2018). Yet, there is rarely any research that emphatically examines PSA. FLCAS measures a comprehensive FLA that covers every aspect of the classroom (e.g. oral test anxiety, oral presentation anxiety, anxiety of answering questions) but not specifically focuses on measuring PSCA such as presentation anxiety. The Public Speaking Class Anxiety Scale (PSCAS) was developed by Yaikhong and Usaha (2012) using 4 speech-anxiety measurements. Compared to PSCAS, Horwitz's FLCAS (1986) focuses on measuring holistic view ofFLA in the classroom rather than measuring PSA in classroom, which could be carried out using Yaikhong and Usaha's PSCAS (2012). PSCAS contains 17 items that are answered on a 5-point Likert scale, ranking from 'strongly agree' (5) to 'strongly disagree' (1). The level of PSCA for individuals or groups is measured based on accumulated scores or mean scores. The total accumulated score is 85 since there are 17 items. Benchmarks are provided as follows, participants with scores above 68 appear to have high anxiety, those between 68-51 are medium, and below 51being low. In academics, public speaking class takes up a great domain of academic achievement because it is required in various aspects of academic assessments in English-medium classrooms, such as oral exams, in-class presentations, and group discussions (Alharbi & Smith, 2018).

Public speaking class has been shown to be important in academic contexts because PSCA was found as the mediation of students' academic achievement (Ali et al., 2021). In other words, students' academic performance varies according to the level of PSCA they have. In addition, speaking anxiety directly decreases overall speaking performance (Sutarsyah, 2017). Students with lower anxiety levels perform better in speaking, which further supports the influence of PSCA on speaking performance and its eventual effect on academic achievement.

Classroom speaking anxiety varies according to the extent of English-relevance in the study program. It is found that English literature students

experienced the least anxiety across all components of PSCA compared to those inother programmes such as physical science, social science, computer science andtechnology (Ali et al., 2021). Similarly, Chinese university students also showed asimilar pattern of classroom speaking anxiety, which the FLCA differs betweenEnglish and non-English majors (Naudhani et al., 2018). Both studies reveal thediscrepancy of classroom speaking anxiety between English and non-Englishstudents, which is mainly due to the frequency of English being used in the classroom.Length of study is another possible factor affecting the variance of PSCA. As discovered by Khoshlessan and Das (2017), international students in the United Statessuffered from presentation anxiety at all levels of study from freshman to doctoral. The study revealed that presentation anxiety was affected by the length of study. Thisis echoed by Heng (2019), who also revealed that CISs' anxious speaking situationsvaried between freshmen and sophomores. First-year students showed a greater levelof anxiety in classroom participation, while second-year students felt anxious to speakoutside the classroom. Jiang and Dewaele (2020) explained the changes are based onthe length of study. According to their results, the experience of studying abroad has asignificant impact on CISs, particularly on FLA. In addition, the frequency of

language use also partially explained the reduction of FLA.

Methodology

Research Design and Instrument

To address the Research Questions, this study was conducted in a quantitative research design because, besides demographic characteristics, the questionnaire only collected quantitative data.

The research instrument used was a self-assessed questionnaire developed by Yaikhong and Usaha (2012) called PSCAS, which adapts a 4 speech-anxiety measurement. Unlike PSCAS, Horwitz's FLCAS was not used in this study because it focuses on every aspect of classroom anxiety, rather than only measuring PSA in the classroom. In this research, the questionnaire was designed into 2 parts: Part A and Part B. For convenience in understanding, the questionnaire was designed to bebilingual (English and Chinese). Part A contained 5 questions collecting demographic information by asking gender, age, faculty, major, and study year. Part B contained 17PSCAS-items, used to evaluate PSCA levels (low, medium, high) in the classroom. A 5-point Likert Scale was used in all PSCAS items because it can provide a highly reliable estimation of personal ability and can validly interpret data through a variety of means (Nemoto & Beglar, 2014). The level of PSCA was measured by categorizing the cumulated scores based on Yaikhong and Usaha's Benchmarks (2012). Participants with scores above 68 were labeled high anxiety, with between 68-51 being medium, and below 51 being low.

Notably, as Liu (2017) pointed out, the value of Items 4, 8, 10, and 12 should be calculated in reverse because they show opposite meanings to other items inPSCAS. In other words, in Items 4, 8, 10, and 12, 'strongly agree' represents the scoreof 1 instead of 5 and vice versa. This study was guided by Liu's suggestion, thus, items 4, 8, 10, and 12 were counted in reverse.

Participants

Since this study focuses on CIUs, the criterion of selection was the Chinese international students at undergraduate level in a Malaysian public university. This
study used convenience sampling. Participants from all programs in year 1 to year 4 were accessible to the questionnaire. They were divided into English and non-English programs and were classified by the year of study. There were 36 respondents in total.

Data Collection

The data was collected using a questionnaire which was disseminated using Google Form. The link to the Google Form was sent to target respondents through personal messages on a social media platform. Unlike Malaysians, Chinese students are more familiar with WeChat. To ensure the data has been successfully collected,the respondents were required to personally inform the researchers about their completion. Then, the researchers would tally both the number of respondents in Google Forms with those who had informed of their completion. Uninformed or uncompleted submissions would then be reminded to respondents accordingly toaccelerate submission.

Data Analysis

Descriptive analysis was used to answer Research Question 1. To investigate the majority level of PSCA, a table of mean and standard deviation was made. To further understand the percentage of common levels of PSCA, individual results were categorized into 3 levels (low, medium, high), showing the largest proportion of PSCA level. For Research Question 2, the samples were separated into 2 groups basedon their study programme (English and non-English). Then, the independent sample t-test was used to compare the significance of PSCA difference between English and non-English groups. For Research Question 3, descriptive analysis was applied. The means of PSCAS in each year were then calculated and organized into a line chart to illustrate the changing patterns (upward or downward trend) of PSCA in each year of study. To investigate the PSCA level, descriptive analysis was used to demonstrate theoverall PSCA mean, meanwhile, percentages were calculated to further study the proportion of majority PSCA level among respondents. To discover the difference, an independent sample t-test was applied to compare the level of PSCA between English and non-English groups. To explore the changing pattern of PSCA, each year's mean was calculated and arranged in a line chart for illustrating the 4-year pattern.

Results and Discussion
The Majority Level of PSCA

To answer Research Question 1, a descriptive analysis was conducted toinvestigate the majority of PSCA levels of the examined group (36 CIUs in the university). As can be seen in Table 1, the mean is 54.33 ranging from the lowest 39to highest 68. Based on Yaikhong and Usaha's benchmarks (2012), 54 is consideredas a medium anxiety because it falls between

51-68.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of Average PSCAS

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation
PSCAS	36	39	68	54.33	7.71
Valid N (listwise)	36				

To further study the proportion of majority PSCA level, Table 2, on the other hand, shows that 75% (27) of the participants experienced medium anxiety, while 25% (9) was experiencing low anxiety. None of the participants showed high anxiety. Thus, the tallied results of PSCAS scores indicated that these (36) Chinese students mostly (75%) experienced a medium level of PSCA in English-medium classrooms.

Table 2
Categories of Anxiety Group

Anxiety Group	Low Anxiety	Medium Anxiety	High Anxiety
Mean	<51	51-68	>68
Total	9	27	0
Percentage	25%	75%	0

These findings echo with previous studies, both, investigating public speaking anxiety and classroom speaking anxiety contexts (e.g. Naudhani et al., 2018; Fei & Shabdin 2019; Jiang & Dewaele, 2020). While Naudhani et al. (2018) observed that most mainland Chinese students showed a middle to high level of FLCA when it comes to classroom speaking context, Jiang and Dewaele (2020) later found out that most mainland Chinese university consider that public speaking posits the most anxiety-provoking situation. Similarly, Fei and Shabdin (2019) found that classroom communication apprehension was the dominant source of FLCA among Chinese students in Malaysia. In other words, most students were nervous, worried, and lacked confidence when speaking English in the classroom, despite their level of studies.

PSCA Difference Between English and Non-English Majors
Research Question 2 was directed to discover the difference of PSCA between English and non-English majors. With regards, an independent sample t-test was carried out.

Table 3

Test of Normality

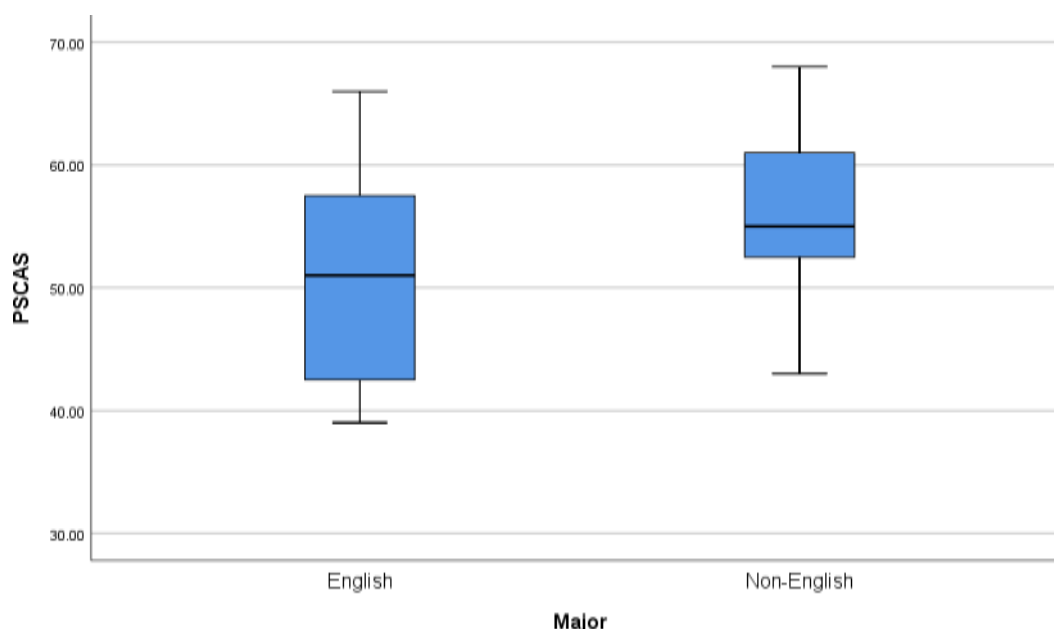|	**Kolmogorov-Smirnov**[a]				**Shapiro-Wilk**		
	Major	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
PSCAS	English	.156	12	.200[*]	.954	12	.702
	Non-English	.107	24	.200[*]	.967	24	.594
	*. This is a lower bound of the true significance. a. Lilliefors Significance Correction.						

Figure 1. Box Plot of English and Non-English Majors

As can be seen in Table 3 and Figure 1, the English and non-English major distributions were sufficiently normal for the purpose of conducting a t-test as both sets of data were approximately normally distributed.

Table 4
Descriptive Statistics of English and Non-English Majors

	Major	**N**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**Std. Error Mean**
PSCAS	English	12	50.7500	8.36796	2.41562
	Non-English	24	56.1250	6.84177	1.39657

Based on Table 4, the English group (N = 12) was associated with a PSCAS M = 50.75 (SD = 8.36). By comparison, the non-English group (N = 24) was associatedwith a numerically higher PSCAS M = 56.12 (SD = 1.39).

Table 5
Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
PSCAS	Equal variances assumed	.661	.422	-2.063	34	.047	-5.37500	2.60576	-10.67054	-.07946
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.926	18.589	.069	-5.37500	2.79028	-11.22386	.47386

Based on Table 5, the assumption of homogeneity of variances was tested and satisfied via Levene's *F* test, *F* (34) = .66, *p* = .422. The independent samples t-test was associated with a significant effect, *t*(34) = -2.063, *p* = .047<0.05. Cohen's *d* was estimated at 0.703, which was a medium to large effect based on Cohen's guidelines (1992). Thus, there was a statistically significant difference of PSCA between English and non-English students, in which English majors were associated with a significantly lower level of PSCA, and vice versa.

This finding is consistent with Ali et al. (2021) who conducted a study in Pakistan, which indicated a likelihood of PSCA levels varying within different academic programmes. In the study, social science students appeared the most with PSCA in terms of communication apprehension, fear of evaluation, and test anxiety, while English literature students did not. In the Chinese ESL learner context, Naudhani et al. (2018) drew a similar conclusion about the significant difference of speaking anxiety between majors. In the study, FLA was examined between English and non-English majors in a Chinese university. Even though PSCA was not examined, the results were strongly in line with this present study, in which there was a significant speaking anxiety difference between English and non-English groups. In other words, the levels of FLA and PSCA were higher in non-English groups but lower in English.

The Changing Pattern of PSCA
To answer Research Question 3, a descriptive analysis was conducted to calculate PSCAS mean in each year of study and discover the changing pattern by arranging the means in a line graph to show the upward and downward trend of the 4 years of study.

Table 6
Descriptive Statistics of PSCAS from Year 1-4

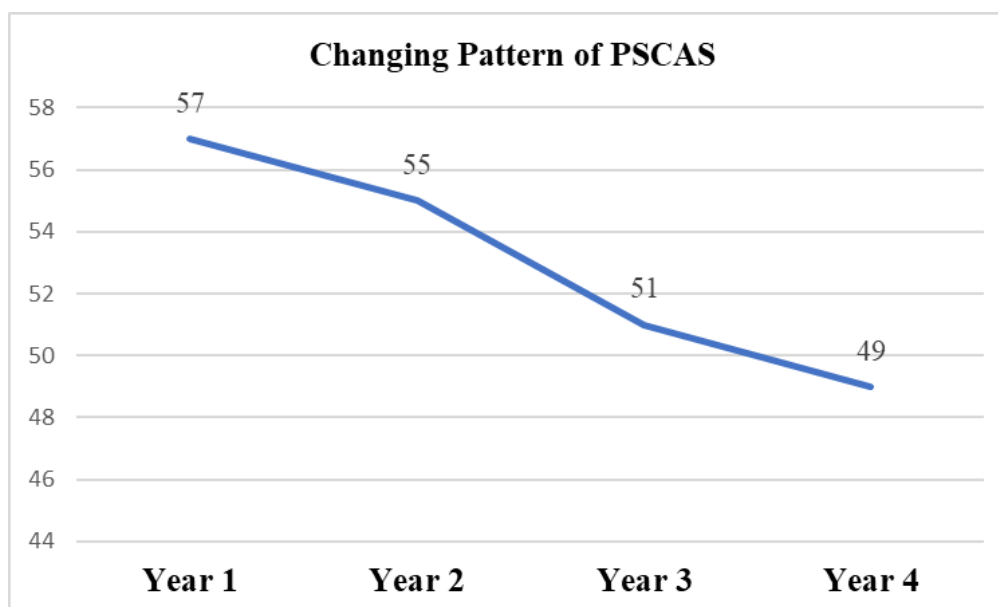| Year	N	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
1	9	57.11	59	8.67	42	68
2	15	55.40	56	7.29	43	67
3	10	51.30	52.5	7.06	39	64
4	2	49.00	49	7.07	44	54
Total	36	54.33	54	7.71	39	68

Figure 2. Changing Patterns of PSCAS

Based on Figure 2, a moderate downward trend of PSCA was discovered throughout the 4 years of study, in which PSCAS decreased from the highest (57, medium anxiety) in year 1 to the lowest (49, low anxiety) in year 4. From year 1 to year 3, PSCA considerably dropped from 57 to 51, but it still fell between a medium anxiety level (51-68). However, the PSCA became a low level in the final year students, which slightly decreased from 51 in Year 3 to 49 in Year 4. Thus, the resultsillustrated a consistent downward trend of PSCA throughout the 4 years of study. Dropping from a medium anxiety level (57) in Year 1 to a low level (49) in Year 4.

This finding confirms a decreasing tendency of PSCA with the growth of the study year, in which the pattern was not directly examined in previous studies but theyall revealed that the level of PSCA was different in terms of study year (Heng 2019; Khoshlessan & Das 2017). For instance, Khoshlessan and Das (2017) observed that class presentation anxiety differently existed in all levels of international students. In addition, Heng (2019) found that there was a shift in PSCA-provoking situations between Year 1 and Year 2 CISs, from classroom speaking anxiety to social (outside classroom) speaking anxiety respectively. By reviewing both studies, none directly supports the declining trend because PSCA was only mentioned differently in each year of study. Thus, this study may reveal the possibility that CIUs' PSCA gradually decline when the year of study increases. According to Jiang and Dewaele (2020), the decreasing pattern of PSCA on CIUs could be due to their abroad experience and frequent language use. Hence, it could be assumed that, as these students accumulate more years of study, they become more familiar in handling English public speaking in the classroom which causes anxiety to decrease year by year.

Conclusion
The results of PSCAS scores indicated that 36 (75%) CIUs in the university mostly experienced a medium level of PSCA in English-medium classrooms. The
results revealed that there was a statistically significant difference of PSCA between English and non-English majors. Among these CIUs, it was confirmed that English majors were associated with a lower level of PSCA, and vice versa. The results illustrated a downward trend of PSCA in the 4-year study. Dropping from a medium anxiety level (57) in Year 1 to a low

level (49) in Year 4. The present study contributes a few things to the current PSCA research field in Malaysia. First, it helps the literature scarce on investigating the level of PSCA among CIUs in Malaysia. Second, it confirms that the difference of PSCA between English and non-English majors in CIUs community in Malaysia is consistent with previous relevant studies. Third, a downward trend of PSCA with the growth of study year is confirmed in this study, which has not been directly proven in previous studies.

To sum up, the purpose of this study is to investigate the majority level of PSCA, discover the difference of PSCA between English and non-English majors, and explore the changing pattern of PSCA. Descriptive analysis and independent samples t-test were the methods used. The results showed the majority level of PSCA was medium, discovered a significant difference of PSCA between English and non-English majors, and confirmed the continuous decline of PSCA is the 4-year pattern. This study contributes to the scarce literature of PSCA research on CIUs in Malaysia. Investigating a larger sample population and applying qualitative research methods are the limitations and suggestions.

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