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It is not easy to land a dream job. Most of the time, it may take many false starts before one actually gets there. Some less fortunate will continue to chase that elusive career goal for a long time. For school leavers, finding the right career based on their choice of tertiary education may be daunting, what more in the current uncertain times. But such big decisions have to be made. So, what's a good field of study during volatile times?

According to Talent2 International Ltd director for South Asia, Leigh Howard, if students are deciding about their careers based on relevance and affordability, the general advice is to look for professions that are "recession proof."

"Accounting and nursing are good examples," he says.

Howard also points out that the service sector is promising as it accounts for over 50% of Malaysia's gross domestic product (GDP), while the manufacturing industry only contributes over 20%.

"Services also account for more than two-thirds of the economy for countries such as Singapore and Australia," he says, adding that demand for jobs in the education sector is also on the rise.

Manpower Staffing Services (M) Sdn Bhd corporate affairs director Jiza Hussain concurs with Howard that despite the gloomy economic outlook, there are many pockets in the country's services sector that are in great need of staff such as finance and accounting, call centres, business process outsourcing and shared services for information technology.

The banking sector also offers bright career prospects for the future, although the current outlook may appear gloomy.

"Despite what you see on the news, banking is probably a safe career bet for the long term," says Howard.

According to Malaysian Association of Private Colleges and Universities (Macpu) secretary-general and UCESI University president Peter Ng, many colleges and universities in Malaysia offer good

Career choices

It is vital to keep abreast with the latest job trends



Howard: Accounting and nursing are good examples of recession-proof jobs

courses at affordable rates.

Over the past few years, Ng says Malaysian universities and colleges have attracted thousands of foreign students and the country is well-equipped to be a regional education hub.

"Besides that, students facing financial constraints could obtain study loans from the National Higher Education Fund Corp (PTPTN) for local studies," he points out, adding that when the economy improves, students eager to pursue education abroad can do so by choosing to do a post-graduate course instead.

It is imperative for students, in order to make the right career decision, to keep themselves updated with the latest trends in the job market.

As it stands, courses that are

popular among local students, says an observer, include biological sciences, medicine and pharmacy, largely as a result of the booming job market in healthcare.

But most importantly, and as pointed out by Ng, students should pick courses that are of interest to them.

While parents may be displeased if their children do not opt for traditional or safe professions, Ng says students ought to pursue their dream careers, independent of parental pressures.

"Whether it be history, science or even acting – if you are passionate, then you won't be in it for the money and overall you will most likely have a successful and enjoyable life," Howard says.

That way, there is a higher chance of one finding job satisfaction, an

element that may be elusive for a good portion of the average employee.

"It is important to remember that this is something you will be doing for the rest of your working life. You want to be in a job that you are interested in and look forward to everyday," says a local human resources consultant.

"If you are going to spend every waking morning dreading to go to work, then you are just wasting your time, energy and your life," he says.

According to him, many students who embark on a degree lose interest along the way and end up choosing a career that they did not study for.

"Many students are still unaware of what they want to do even when they are already pursuing their

degrees. Most of them go into it usually because their parents urge them to do so or because they feel the career may be glamorous or lucrative."

"A good thing to do is to take up an internship and see what it is like in practice. It is better to find out early that it is not the career for you instead of later, after spending thousands of dollars on something you have no intention of pursuing," he says.

Eddie (not his real name) has a degree in law but is now into real estate. But he has no regrets reading law.

"I was interested (in becoming a lawyer) in the beginning but after qualifying and working with a couple of law firms, I realised it wasn't for me. Still, I feel that my degree has opened a lot of career opportunities for me and it is not a total waste," he says.

A human resources consultant says people that are in high demand, regardless of an economic downturn, include accountants, doctors, nurses and teachers.

"As long as there are taxes, there will always be a need for accountants to help clients keep their books in order. People get hurt or sick everyday, so the need for medical practitioners will also never run dry."

"Also, there will always be the need for a good education. A teacher is probably one of the most under-rated jobs out there, but apart from parents, I feel they are responsible for the people of tomorrow," she says.

One also does not need to be a full-time employee to ensure a stable income stream. Aishah, a freelance journalist, knows the benefits of working from home.

"The advantage of working from home is that you don't have to worry about being retrenched, especially in the current economic climate. You are your own boss and you have the luxury of working at your own pace."

"Being self-employed, I don't have to worry about overheads or daily operational costs that come with running a normal office. This allows me to offer my services at more competitive levels," she says.