EDUCATION

SHOULD YOU TAKE ENGINEERING AND IBA PREPARATION AT THE SAME TIME?

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Every year, when admission season rolls around, students are faced with the difficult decision of selecting which stream of higher education they wish to pursue. Each field, be it STEM, arts and humanities, or business studies, requires a completely different approach, mindset, and preparation strategy.

That being said, preparing for multiple fields or academic tracks is a common strategy among students. A notable trend here is seen among science background students who usually target engineering programmes as their primary objective but keep business degrees, particularly at Dhaka University's (DU) Institute of Business Administration (IBA), as an alternative option.

Two years ago, I was in the same boat. My main goal was to get into the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), so I poured most of my time into engineering preparation while simultaneously preparing for IBA. Looking back, I can tell you that juggling two of the most competitive exams in the country is not for everyone.

THE DUALITY OF THE EXAMS

The first thing you need to understand is just how different the engineering and IBA admission tests are. Engineering admission



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tests require you to be quick and precise with your problem-solving. You need a deep understanding of HSC-level physics, chemistry, and higher mathematics, and the ability to solve complex equations with significant time constraints. You have to develop a muscle memory for problem types over months of drilling.

On the other hand, IBA is more of an aptitude test which assesses your basic mathematics, English proficiency, and analytical ability. The admission test for DU-IBA also features a "Communication Test" in the second stage, where candidates must answer questions about themselves under pressure.

These are two fundamentally different paths, and most candidates will struggle to constantly switch between them. In my case, my foundation in mathematics, English, and other science subjects was strong, which worked in my favour. But not everyone shares the same starting point.

For Mohammed Tarifur Rahman, who ranked 353rd in BUET and 18th in DU-IBA in the 2025 admission tests, IBA started as little more than a side quest. "In college, my English was pretty good, so I asked myself: how hard could the IBA admission test be?" he recalls. "I bought a few books on English and analytical reasoning and started going through them."



PHOTO: **AL ARAF**

However, once he actually started preparing for the IBA, Tarifur quickly realised how challenging it would be.

"I was confident about my English and mathematics before starting my IBA preparations," he says. "But going through the past IBA admission questions diminished my confidence."

THE STRESS OF THE EXAM TIMELINES

Engineering and the IBA admission tests tend to fall in a very compressed window of time, giving you very little breathing room, usually around 30-40 days.

While candidates pursuing any one of the two tracks can dedicate their time to intensive revising, dual-track candidates have to keep switching between the two, meaning neither preparation gets the push it needs.

In my own experience, I managed to keep my focus intact during the first few months, cracking a few engineering admission tests early. I then shifted my focus to IBA in the month before the admission test and, due to my prior preparation, managed to get through it.

Unfortunately for me, getting into IBA shifted my attention in a way I had not anticipated. I could never fully shift my focus to engineering preparation afterwards, and by the time my BUET admission test came around, I was unable to do the very important last-minute revision it demanded.

Moreover, success or failure in any one of the exams will drastically affect your focus for the next one. Tarifur experienced this first-hand as the transition between the two exams was one of the hardest parts of the journey. "The period between the IBA and BUET admission tests gave me a great deal of pain," he recalls. "After I was almost sure I bombed my IBA exam, I lost all interest in studying."

DIVIDING YOUR TIME

Both engineering and IBA preparation are individually demanding enough to consume your entire day on their own. Engineering preparation is relentless – marathon classes, weekly exams, and solving question banks with thousands of problems. Practising your timing and accuracy is crucial, and it easily eats up most of your day.

IBA preparation also has its own non-negotiables: acquiring English grammar proficiency, quick hand calculation skills (as using calculators is prohibited in the exam), and analytical instinct. These are not skills you can develop in the last minute.

You will need to sit down with yourself, find out your weaknesses and strengths and prioritise your time accordingly. Between the two, I always felt more confident in my aptitude for the IBA admission test. Since I felt that my English and analytical skills were solid, I utilised my time to get better at hand calculations. On the other hand, I identified some big gaps in my chemistry and physics preparation, so the bulk of my day went towards practising equations and physics diagrams.

Zarin Ashraf Moon, who ranked 1072nd in BUET, 19th in BUET Architecture, and 107th in DU IBA admission tests in 2024, does not recommend dual preparation, but for those who will attempt it anyway, she offers a practical framework: "I suggest the 80-20 method. Put 80 percent of your time into engineering preparation and the rest for the IBA preparation."

FINANCIAL COST

Something that easily gets overlooked is the financial commitment of preparing for two admission tests. Most admission candidates will enrol in a single coaching programme, hire a private tutor, or both. The expenses start to add up with the cost of books, question banks, and mock tests. Engineering and IBA coaching classes aren't cheap.

For many families, the admission season is a significant financial burden. Taking the dual route can make the burden heavier, especially if the other option is only being kept as a safety net. So, this is a conversation worth having before taking the double route.

WHAT DO YOU ACTUALLY WANT?

It may feel reassuring to prepare for both engineering and IBA just for the sake of having a safety net. But you have to ask yourself whether you are genuinely interested in pursuing both paths or if you are simply reacting out of societal or family pressure. Aiming for IBA merely because it sounds prestigious when your passion lies in engineering will lead to misplaced effort. The same is true the other way around.

Zarin is direct on this point. "Not only are both admission tests incredibly difficult, but they are also completely different in nature," she says. "Moreover, there is a luck factor in every admission test. In my opinion, it is truly not worth it to prepare for two of the hardest and most competitive exams simultaneously."

If you are truly interested in pursuing either business or engineering as a career, the dual preparation approach might be worth attempting. You, however, need to go in with a clear primary target and know which exam you would rather ace, ensuring that your preparation reflects that. You should also be prepared to drop one track if it no longer feels sustainable.

Faiza Zarin Zaara is probably watching her 3rd movie of the day. Suggest her something niche to hyperfixate on at: faiza.zarin.zaara.317@gmail.com