




A good thing takes time: The role of preparation time in asynchronous video interviews

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Abstract

Asynchronous video interviews (AVIs) are increasingly used to preselect applicants. Previous research found that interviewees in AVIs receive better interview ratings compared to other forms of interviews. It has been suggested that this difference could be due to the preparation time given for each AVI question. A pilot study confirmed that preparation time in AVIs is indeed beneficial for interview performance. Furthermore, our main study replicated the significant effect of preparation time on interview performance and revealed that it was mediated by active response preparation, whereas no mediation effects were found for strain and for the use of impression management. Finally, preparation time had no direct effect on fairness perceptions but a positive indirect effect via honest impression management.

KEYWORDS

applicant reactions, asynchronous video interviews, personnel selection, selection interviews, technology-mediated interviews

Practitioner points

- It was previously suggested that applicants receive better interview ratings in asynchronous video interviews (AVIs) than in synchronous interviews because of the preparation time that is provided for each question in an AVI.
- Our results confirmed that preparation time in AVIs indeed leads to better interview performance ratings.
- The positive effects of preparation time were due to active response preparation (i.e., interviewees made notes and structured their answers).
- Longer preparation time did not affect dishonest impression management or fairness perceptions but might affect the validity of AVIs.

Due to technological progress during the last decades, new methods for personnel selection have emerged (Woods et al., 2020). One of these personnel selection methods are asynchronous video interviews (AVIs), which are also called video interviews (Toldi, 2011) or digital interviews

(Langer et al., 2017). AVIs represent a noninteractive and web-based preselection interview method (Lukacik et al., 2020). In these interviews, interviewees are shown questions on the screen and they have to answer these questions within a specific predefined response time.

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Interviewees' answers are recorded via webcam and microphone so that recruiters can evaluate them at a later time. Therefore, the usage of AVIs is independent of time and place, as applicants complete the interviews on their own devices whenever they want to.

To date, there are only a few studies on AVIs (e.g., Basch & Melchers, 2019; Bird et al., 2019; Brenner et al., 2016; Hiemstra et al., 2019; Langer et al., 2020, 2017). Most of these addressed interviewees' perceptions of these interviews. However, the few studies that investigated effects on interview performance found better performance ratings in AVIs compared to synchronous kinds of interviews, such as videoconference interviews (Langer et al., 2017) or face-to-face (FTF) interviews (Castro & Gramzow, 2015). These results are in contrast to meta-analytic results showing better performance in FTF than in technology-mediated interviews (Blacksmith et al., 2016). Furthermore, relevant theories in the domain of technology-mediated communication such as social presence theory (Short et al., 1976) or media richness theory (Daft & Lengel, 1986) would also generally predict lower performances in technology-mediated than in FTF interviews.

As a post-hoc explanation for higher performance ratings in AVIs, Langer et al. (2017) suggested that preparation time could be responsible for this difference (also see Lukacik et al., 2020). That is, interviewees in AVIs are granted some time to prepare their answers before they start to record them, which—according to our review of the leading provider's websites and personal communication with providers—usually ranges from 30 s to 3 min. This preparation time is a distinct difference between AVIs and other types of interviews. However, so far it has not yet been empirically tested whether the provision of preparation time indeed impacts performance in AVIs. Furthermore, alternative processes beyond active preparation of a response, such as lower strain or increased use of impression management (IM) tactics, might also contribute to the beneficial effects of preparation time on interview performance (Lukacik et al., 2020).

Accordingly, the aim of the present research was (a) to test whether the provision of preparation time in AVIs indeed leads to better performance in AVIs and (b) to examine the underlying processes that lead to potential performance improvements. By experimentally investigating the influence of preparation time on performance in AVIs, the present research represents a first step in a clarification of whether the provision of preparation time is indeed beneficial for interview performance. If this would be the case, this represents an important step to understand the differences between synchronous and asynchronous interviews.

1 | BACKGROUND

1.1 | Asynchronous video interviews

AVIs have several potential advantages for organizations (Lukacik et al., 2020). First, as already noted above, the administration of AVIs is independent regarding time and place, so that the resulting decrease in scheduling and travel is considered as the major advantage of AVIs (Brenner et al., 2016; Shah et al., 2012). Second, recruiters

can evaluate the recorded answers independently and also view these answers multiple times. Third, AVIs are highly standardized because all applicants are asked the same questions in the same order. Given the clear evidence that standardization increases reliability and validity (Huffcutt et al., 2013, 2014), AVIs, therefore, offer potential psychometric benefits. And finally, during the Covid-19 pandemic, AVIs are a tool that also allowed to conduct interviews during times of social distancing (Gibson et al., 2021).

However, AVIs also comes with some disadvantages compared to other kinds of interviews. Specifically, interviewees react more negatively to AVIs than to FTF interviews and synchronous technology-mediated interviews (Basch, Melchers, Kegelmann et al., 2020; Hiemstra et al., 2019; Langer et al., 2017). These more negative reactions are usually explained by the lack of direct interaction between interviewees and interviewers given that AVIs are conducted asynchronously and that interviewers do not respond to interviewees when they evaluate the recorded answers. The missing direct interaction, for example, goes against the two-way communication rule of Gilliland's (1993) fairness model.

Furthermore, AVIs provide less social presence (Short et al., 1976) than FTF and videoconference interviews. Social presence refers to the awareness of the communication partner or "the sense of being together" (Ijsselstein et al., 2003, p. 2). As this presence is a summary of mutual awareness regarding facial expressions, gestures, and gaze, it is obvious that AVIs come with a disadvantage in this regard (Short et al., 1976). Moreover, Basch, Melchers, Kegelmann et al. (2020) found that lower ratings of interviewees' perceived social presence were associated with lower perceived possibilities to use IM strategies, which in turn negatively influenced interviewees' fairness perceptions.

1.2 | Preparation time in AVIs

A typical attribute on which AVIs can differ from other forms of interviews is that AVIs can be set up with a predefined preparation time for each question. Preparation time is determined by the recruiter and is kept constant for all interviewees. According to our review of some of the most common providers of AVIs (e.g., www.hirevue.com, www.modernhire.com, www.assessment.aon.com, or www.viasto.de), preparation time usually ranges from 30 s to 3 min. For example, Hirevue sets the preparation time by default at 30 s, Modernhire (formerly Sonru) grants applicants between 1 and 2 min. Additionally, Aon also grants customizable preparation times in the range from 30 s to 3 min. Interviewees can choose to use less than the maximum preparation time (and can even skip it), but they cannot exceed it. During this time, they can think about how they want to answer a question and can even take notes that they may use while responding to a question.

As mentioned above, Langer et al. (2017) found higher performance ratings for interviewees in AVIs compared to synchronous video interviews. Similarly, in a study by Castro and Gramzow (2015), participants in AVIs showed better interview performance compared to participants in FTF interviews. In search of explanations for these differences, one might consider the interview performance model by Huffcutt et al.

(2011). In this model, Huffcutt et al. (2011) described several factors both on the side of the interviewer and on the side of the interviewee that might influence performance ratings in employment interviews. Not only individual factors play a role in this model, but also interactive factors and situational factors such as the interview medium. Furthermore, Huffcutt et al. (2011) noted that the interview training literature stresses that interviewees can improve the quality and relevance of their answers by organizing and structuring their thoughts before answering (also see Maurer et al., 2008), hereinafter referred to as active response preparation. Even without training, taking notes and structuring one's thoughts before the answer ("think before you speak," Maurer et al., 1998, p. 130) is much easier in AVIs given the usual preparation time. Preparation time in AVIs would, therefore, also explain why participants in the studies by Langer et al. (2017) and Castro and Gramzow (2015) received higher ratings in these interviews compared to video-conference interviews or FTF interviews, in which usually no preparation time is given. However, whether preparation time indeed has a beneficial effect on performance in AVIs, has not been investigated so far. Therefore, we want to test the following two predictions:

Hypothesis 1. *The provision of preparation time in AVIs leads to higher performance ratings in comparison to when no preparation time is provided.*

Hypothesis 2. *The effect of preparation time on interview performance is mediated by active response preparation.*

However, alternative or additional explanations may also apply. The first explanation concerns the possible effects of the provision of preparation time on interviewees' level of strain. Specifically, employment interviews are stressful situations due to their selective nature and the pressure to perform well. Accordingly, they can lead to unpleasant emotions in applicants (Heimberg et al., 1986; Posthuma et al., 2002). Furthermore, in the interview performance model, Huffcutt et al. (2011) postulated that interviewees' current state of mind at the time of the interview possibly has an impact on their performance. In line with this assumption, recent meta-analytic results by Powell et al. (2018) confirmed that interview anxiety is negatively related to interview performance.

With regard to the potential effects of preparation time, a recent conceptual paper by Lukacik et al. (2020) suggested that longer preparation time in AVIs might reduce interview anxiety. Similarly, interviewees might perceive less strain with a longer preparation time. Furthermore, the literature on time pressure is also informative in this regard. For example, it has been found that time pressure can lead to strain and unpleasant emotions, at least in the context of learning environments (Pekrun, 2006; Zeidner, 1998). Furthermore, meta-analytic findings confirmed an overall negative correlation between strain and work performance (Gilboa et al., 2008). Applying this to the context of AVIs, it seems possible that the provision of preparation time decreases time pressure and the corresponding level of strain. This reduced level of strain might subsequently have a positive effect on performance in AVIs. Accordingly, we assume:

Hypothesis 3. *The effect of preparation time on interview performance is mediated by the level of experienced strain.*

According to Huffcutt et al. (2011) interviewee performance model, interviewees proactively try to improve the outcome of an interview and strive to make a good impression. Differences in the use of IM tactics, therefore, represent another possible reason for better performance in AVIs. Research on IM shows that most, if not all, interviewees use some form of IM (Ellis et al., 2002; Stevens & Kristof, 1995). On the one hand, interviewees can use nonverbal IM such as smiling or nodding, which makes an interviewee's image appear more positive (e.g., Peeters & Lievens, 2006). However, nonverbal tactics are limited in AVIs because of the inherent one-way communication. On the other hand, interviewees can also use verbal IM such as emphasizing their own strengths or downplaying potential failures. In line with this, previous research repeatedly found that the use of such IM behaviors correlates with interview ratings (see Barrick et al., 2009, or Levashina et al., 2014, for meta-analytic evidence). Furthermore, it is possible for interviewees to use the preparation time to think about possibilities to use IM for their answers to make a more positive impression.

With respect to IM and preparation time, deception research is also informative. Even though IM in interviews does not necessarily imply deception (cf. Bourdage et al., 2018; Melchers et al., 2020), there might be similar processes that contribute to both (e.g., Bourdage et al., 2018; Marcus, 2009). Furthermore, various deception studies found that lying takes more time than telling the truth (e.g., Walczyk et al., 2005). This can be explained by the activation-decision-construction model (Walczyk et al., 2003). According to this model, when a question is asked, memory content associated with it is first activated. Then, a decision is made as to whether the truth would harm the person him/herself and, based on that, another decision is made to lie if necessary. In the interview context, this could lead to more deceptive IM. However, if interviewees have more preparation time, they have more time to activate and analyze relevant memory content that might also be used for honest IM. In both cases, however, preparation time could have the effect that interviewees use more IM (Lukacik et al., 2020). Furthermore, given that IM in turn correlates positively with interview performance, Lukacik et al. (2020) suggested that IM could be a mediator that could partially explain the relationship between preparation time and interview performance. Therefore, we predict:

Hypothesis 4. *The effect of preparation time on interview performance is mediated by the use of honest and deceptive IM.*

Notably, Guchait et al. (2014) found that applicants perceived the provision of preparation time in AVIs as a rather positive feature. This is in line with Gilliland's (1993) fairness model from the applicant reactions domain. According to this model, fairness perceptions of a selection procedure are related to different justice rules. Furthermore, fairness perceptions of selection procedures can influence important outcomes like perceptions of organizational attractiveness or applicants' behavioral intentions (Hausknecht et al., 2004) and also their actual job offer acceptance (Harold et al., 2016). In general, FTF interviews meet many of

the justice rules that are described in Gilliland's (1993) model. One rule that seems particularly related to preparation time is the opportunity to perform (Lukacik et al., 2020). This rule includes interviewees' feeling to be able to present themselves and their abilities, qualifications, and skills in an appropriate way. Obviously, this is easier to achieve when more time is given to come up with a suitable answer. Therefore, interviewees might perceive AVIs with preparation time as more favorable, because they have more opportunities to show their full potential through the active use of preparation time. Accordingly, we assume:

Hypothesis 5. *The provision of preparation time leads to higher fairness perceptions in comparison to when no preparation time is provided.*

Basch, Melchers, Kegemann et al. (2020) found that the perceived possibility to use IM in AVIs was limited compared to FTF and videoconference interviews, which ultimately led to lower fairness perceptions of AVIs. However, the provision of preparation time might alleviate this situation when it leads to more IM (see Hypothesis 4). Accordingly, preparation time should not only influence interview performance but also the fairness perception of these interviews. Therefore, we assume:

Hypothesis 6. *The effect of preparation time on fairness perceptions is mediated by the use of IM.*

1.3 | Overview of the present studies

We tested our hypotheses in two experimental studies. We first conducted a pilot study to examine the general effect of preparation time on interview performance ratings. This pilot study represents a first empirical test of the suggestion by Langer et al. (2017) that preparation time contributes to better performance in AVIs. To ultimately attribute differences in performance ratings to preparation time and not to other aspects of the interview modality (e.g., synchronous interaction in Langer et al.'s study), we kept the interview medium constant and only varied preparation time experimentally. The subsequent main study consisted of a second test of the hypothesis that preparation time leads to better interview performance and of an evaluation of underlying mechanisms that might drive the effect of preparation time on interview performance. These mediators included response preparation (Hypothesis 2), strain (Hypothesis 3), and IM (Hypothesis 4). Finally, we also tested our hypothesis on fairness perceptions in AVIs (Hypothesis 5) and a possible mediation effect via IM (Hypothesis 6).

2 | PILOT STUDY

2.1 | Method

2.1.1 | Sample

Overall, 51 volunteers who were recruited via personal contacts completed the interview (30 females, 21 males, age: $M = 28.7$ years,

$SD = 5.49$). Participants' previous work experience ranged from 0 to 31 years, with an average of 4.49 ($SD = 5.86$). The number of previous FTF interviews varied between 0 and 30, with an average of 7.06 interviews ($SD = 6.83$). Only six participants had already completed a videoconference interview ($M = 0.16$, $SD = 0.51$), and none of them had ever completed an AVI. With regard to their highest educational level, 76% had a university degree, 18% had a high school diploma, and 6% had earned a technical upper secondary school diploma by graduating from a technical school. Most participants (63%) were nonstudents.

A power analysis for which we assumed an effect size of $d = 0.59$ on the basis of the comparison of videoconference interviews and AVIs in the study by Langer et al. (2017) revealed a power of 0.56 for the present sample size and a two-tailed test. To reach the conventional power of 0.80, a sample of $N = 94$ would have been required (which was the case for the main study, see below).

2.1.2 | Experimental design and procedure

We used an experimental design (no preparation time vs. preparation time) with a simulated selection interview and participants were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions (no preparation time $n = 26$, preparation time $n = 25$). We chose a between-subjects design to avoid practice effects. Such practice effects would likely have occurred if we had used identical questions twice because participants would have been more familiar with them in the second interview.

Apart from the experimental treatment, all participants followed the same procedure. First, participants received an email, which contained the instructions, a job advertisement for a hypothetical job as a management assistant as well as the link to the AVI and an online questionnaire. The job advertisement contained information about the organization, prospective job tasks and requirements, and benefits for employees. After receiving the email, participants could complete the interview individually anywhere and at a time of their own choice. However, they were instructed to dress adequately for the AVI (i.e., as if they actually applied for a job) and to complete the interview in a calm environment with a stable internet connection. The AVI was administered online through an application (interview suite) provided by viasto GmbH.

As a first step in the AVI, a short welcome video and an introduction page was presented. The introduction page contained information about the handling of the software platform, the duration of the interview, and how it worked technically. Afterward, an equipment check was conducted (ensuring proper functioning of the internet connection, the webcam, and the microphone). Then, participants completed two trial interview questions to further familiarize them with the software application. The trial questions were provided from the platform provider and could be repeated as often as desired. The preparation and response time in the trial questions were the same in both conditions (Question 1: 3 min preparation time and 1 min response time; Question 2: 30 s preparation time and 30 s

response time). Participants were also allowed to view their recorded answers, which were not saved by the software.

For the actual interview, a total of four questions was used and always presented in the same order. These questions represented an open introductory question ("Thank you very much for your application. Please introduce yourself and briefly explain the most important stages of your career to date"), two past-behavior questions (e.g., "Please remember a task in which particularly thorough work was required. (1) What was the task and (2) how did you master it?"), and a self-evaluation question ("Finally, please name three personal strengths and explain how you would apply them to your job"). The questions targeted Organizing and Planning, Conscientious Work Behavior, and Communication Skills.

We used a maximum preparation time of 120 s for each interview question in the condition with preparation time. The rationale for this choice was that 120 s should represent a relatively strong treatment, but still lie within the range of preparation time that is used by common AVI providers. Interviewees could choose to use less than the maximum preparation time. In the other condition, the software required a minimum of 10 s to ensure that interviewees can at least read the respective interview question before they start to record their answer. In both conditions, the questions were shown on the screen for approximately 6 s before the software started the reading/preparation time. The response time (i.e., the maximum length to record answers) was 90 s for the introductory questions and 120 s for each of the other three questions. During this time, the questions were still visible on the screen. After the interview, participants completed an online questionnaire, which assessed demographics (sex, age), education, and work and interview experience.

To determine whether 10 + 6 s are enough to read the questions, we conducted another online study with a comparable sample (age $M = 32.75$, $SD = 13.7$; 59% females; previous interviews $M = 4.41$, $SD = 4.30$). To examine the time participants actually needed to read the questions, we collected data from two groups. Both groups were presented with the interview questions from the pilot study and the main study. Each question was presented on a separate page. One group received the instruction to read each question carefully and then to click *continue* ($n = 14$). The other group received the instruction to read the questions carefully and then to mentally structure their answer before they continued with the next question ($n = 14$). The time that participants spent on each page was automatically tracked by the survey platform. We found that the average reading time for the questions from the pilot study was 9.14 s ($SD = 2.96$), whereas the average time for reading and preparing the answer was 33.07 s ($SD = 5.53$). Thus, the 16 s that were given in the condition without preparation time can be considered sufficient to read the interview questions.

2.1.3 | Scoring

Participants' responses were independently evaluated by two raters on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = *poor performance* to 5 = *excellent performance*. In line with best-practice recommendations (Campion et al., 1997;

TABLE 1 Descriptive information and correlations for all variables in the pilot study

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Age	28.73	5.49				
2. Sex	0.41	0.50	-.02			
3. Work experience	4.49	5.86	.92**	-.05		
4. Condition	0.49	0.51	-.05	-.26	-.10	
5. Interview performance	3.45	0.75	-.11	-.23	-.10	.37**

Note: $N = 51$. Sex was coded 0 = *female*, 1 = *male*; work experience is stated in years. The condition was coded 0 = *without preparation time*, 1 = *with preparation time*.

** $p < .01$.

Taylor & Small, 2002), behavioral anchors were provided for poor, medium, and excellent answers. The two raters were Master level students specializing in work and organizational psychology who received several hours of frame-of-reference training (Melchers et al., 2011; Roch et al., 2012). The average rating across both raters and across all four questions was used as an overall score for interviewees' interview performance. The reliability of this overall score was estimated by calculating an intraclass correlation (ICC 2,2) between the average ratings from both raters across all four questions, which was .97.

2.2 | Results and discussion

Preliminary analyses found no differences between the experimental groups concerning sex, age, prior work or interview experience, and education, all t s < 1.92 , all p s $> .05$. Means (M), standard deviations (SD s), and intercorrelations for sex, age, and the study variables are shown in Table 1.

As can be seen in Table 1, the interview condition was significantly related to participants' overall interview performance. Specifically, in line with our hypothesis, interviewees' overall interview performance was lower in the group without preparation time ($M = 3.18$, $SD = 0.79$) than in the group with preparation time ($M = 3.73$, $SD = 0.59$). Accordingly, a t test for independent samples revealed a significant effect of preparation time on overall interview performance, $t(49) = 7.92$, $p = .004$, $d = 0.79$.

The results of the pilot study are a first indication that preparation time in AVIs contributes to better interview performance. Furthermore, this finding is also in line with corresponding assumptions from the interviewee performance model (Huffcutt et al., 2011). According to conventional standards, the mean difference between the two experimental conditions represents a large effect.

3 | MAIN STUDY

The main study was designed to replicate the effect of preparation time on interview performance with a larger sample on the one hand, and to investigate underlying mechanisms of the effect of

preparation time on interview performance on the other hand. We investigated three possible mechanisms: active response preparation, strain, and IM. In addition, we examined fairness perceptions in AVIs as an additional and theoretically relevant outcome variable.

3.1 | Method

3.1.1 | Sample

The initial sample that completed the preinterview questionnaire consisted of 189 participants. However, our final sample that eventually completed the interview and the postinterview questionnaire consisted of 134 participants¹ (89 females, 45 males; age: $M = 29.07$ years, $SD = 10.13$). A power analysis for a two-tailed test and an assumed effect size of $d = 0.59$ revealed a power of 0.98. The majority of the participants were students from a small German university (52%) and most of the participants (66%) were holding a paid employment. The weekly working time of these participants was $M = 30.95$ hours ($SD = 11.09$). All participants were native German speakers. On average, participants had already taken part in 5.66 FTF interviews ($SD = 6.65$) and in 0.84 technology-mediated interviews ($SD = 1.89$). However, only 4% of the participants had prior experience with AVIs.

Participants were recruited as part of a free training for new forms of selection interviews. The recruiting took place via notices at the university as well as via links on social media platforms (Facebook and LinkedIn). There were no specific requirements for the study. Psychology students could take part in the study to partially fulfill a course requirement.

3.1.2 | Experimental design and procedure

The first part of the study consisted of an online questionnaire, which required participants to complete an informed consent form, a set of demographic questions as well as questions about prior experience with interviews in general and AVIs in particular. At the end of the questionnaire, participants had to leave their email address, so that they could receive the invitation email to the AVI. Then, they were randomly assigned to one of the experimental groups: one group with preparation time ($n = 68$) and one group without preparation time ($n = 66$).

The second part of the study consisted of the AVI. It was administered through the same software platform as in the pilot study. Again, we used the minimum preparation time that was allowed by the system (10 + 6 s reading time) for the group with no preparation time. However, given the large effect of the preparation time on interview performance ratings in the pilot study and also given that shorter preparation times are used for many AVIs in field settings, we decided to reduce the preparation time to 60 (+ 6) seconds to prepare for each interview question. Next, by following the instructions in the invitation email, participants were guided through

the interview platform (welcome video, equipment check, trial interview questions). The interview itself contained seven questions (see below). All other aspects of the administration of the AVI were identical to the pilot study.

As already mentioned for the pilot study, we collected data from an additional sample to evaluate whether 10 + 6 s were enough to read the questions. The results for the interview questions from the main study revealed that average reading time was 13.65 s ($SD = 4.71$), whereas the average time for reading and preparing the answer was 33.66 s ($SD = 9.77$). Thus, the 16 s that were available for participants in the condition without preparation time were long enough to read the questions.

After the completion of the interview, participants received an email with the link to the final online questionnaire. This questionnaire contained questions about response preparation, strain, the possible use of IM tactics, perceived fairness of the interview, a short general mental ability (GMA) test, and a few other items that are not relevant for the hypotheses of the present study.

3.2 | Measures

3.2.1 | Structured interview

The interview consisted of seven questions (one self-evaluation question, two behavioral questions, and four situational questions). The self-evaluation question ("Which characteristics or skills distinguishes you from others and make you interesting for an employer?") was followed by two past-behavior questions (e.g., "Now please think of a situation in the past where you had a hard time and felt that you were not performing well enough. How did you deal with this situation?") and four situational questions (e.g., "Your supervisor informs you that you have to stand in for a colleague in a customer presentation in an hour because he is ill. You do not know the exact field of expertise and you only have the presentation of your colleague plus some basic information. How would you proceed in this situation?"). The situational and past-behavior questions were taken from a study by Ingold et al. (2015) and were targeting Perseverance, Organizing and Planning, and Assertiveness.

The interview responses were independently rated by two raters. These raters were Master level students specializing in work and organizational psychology who received several hours of frame-of-reference training. Each answer was rated on 5-point rating scales ranging from 1 = *poor performance* to 5 = *excellent performance*. As in the pilot study, we followed best-practice recommendations (e.g., Campion et al., 1997; Taylor & Small, 2002) and provided behavioral anchors for poor, medium, and excellent answers. When individual ratings for a question differed two or more points on the 5-point scale, both raters discussed their ratings. For all later analyses, we used the mean of the two average ratings across all seven questions after the discussion. As in the pilot study, we calculated an intraclass correlation (ICC 2,2) to determine the reliability of this mean. Before the discussion, it was .94 and after the discussion it was .95.

3.2.2 | Active response preparation

We used two self-developed items to measure whether participants made active use of the preparation time to prepare their responses (e.g., "I actively used the preparation time to take notes for answering the interview questions"; both items and all other items for the subsequent measures can be found in Appendix A). Participants responded on a 5-point rating scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. Coefficient alpha was .54.

3.2.3 | Strain

The strain was measured with a short German-language questionnaire from Müller and Basler (1993). It contained six bipolar adjective pairs (e.g., *tense*–*at ease*, *relaxed*–*uneasy*). The adjective pairs had to be rated on a 6-point scale (e.g., 1 = *tense* to 6 = *at ease*). Coefficient alpha was .87.

3.2.4 | Impression management

Participants were asked to indicate their use of IM during the interview with 11 items taken from Roulin and Bourdage (2017). Six measured honest IM (three items targeted self-promotion, e.g., "In the interview, I talked about my past work experience to emphasize my competence", and the other three targeted defensive IM, e.g., "I shared my past regrets about how I handled certain situations, and how I would improve in the future," $\alpha = .71$) and five measured deceptive IM (two items on slight image creation, e.g., "I exaggerated my responsibilities on my previous jobs," and three items on extensive image creation, e.g., "I made up stories about my work experiences that were well developed and logical," $\alpha = .75$). Participants responded on a 5-point rating scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*.

3.2.5 | Fairness perceptions

Participants had to rate the perceived fairness of the interview on a 5-point rating scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. We used two subscales from the Selection Procedural Justice Scale (Bauer et al., 2001) in a German translation from Manzey and Gurk (2005). These two subscales represented chance to perform (four items, e.g., "In such an interview I can really show my skills and abilities," $\alpha = .82$) and global fairness (two items, e.g., "I think that such an interview is a fair way to select people"; $\alpha = .77$).

3.2.6 | General mental ability

GMA was included as a potential control variable because it is known from previous meta-analyses that GMA correlates with interview

performance (Berry et al., 2007; Huffcutt et al., 1996). To measure it, we used the mini-q from Baudson and Preckel (2015). The mini-q is a German adaptation of the 3-min test from Baddeley (1968). It contains 64 items and allows an economic measurement of cognitive reasoning based on grammatical transformations. Its split-half reliability (using an odd-even split) was .96 in the present sample.

3.3 | Results

3.3.1 | Preliminary analyses

Preliminary analyses with *t* tests revealed that the experimental groups did not differ concerning sex, age, mother tongue, working hours per week, prior interview experience, or GMA, all *t*s < 1.28, all *p*s > .20. The means, *SD*s, and intercorrelations for all study variables are displayed in Table 2. Apart from the relationships examined in the hypotheses, we also found significant negative correlations between age and interview performance, $r = -.20$, $p = .02$, as well as between age and GMA, $r = -.33$, $p < .001$. Additionally, and in line with previous research (e.g., Salgado & Moscoso, 2002), we found a significant positive correlation for GMA and interview performance, $r = .21$, $p = .01$.

3.3.2 | Test of hypotheses

The means for both groups and the effect sizes for all the dependent variables can be seen in Table 3. In line with Hypothesis 1 and the pilot study, interview performance ratings were higher in the condition with preparation time than in the condition without preparation time, $t(132) = 3.99$, $p < .001$. The corresponding effect size represents a moderate to large effect, $d = 0.68$ (Cohen, 1992).

Hypothesis 2 stated that active response preparation would mediate the relationship between preparation time and interview performance. First, in addition to the difference concerning interview performance, we also found a significant difference of active response preparation between the two groups, $t(132) = 6.95$, $p < .001$. Furthermore, in line with Hypothesis 2, a mediation analysis with the PROCESS macro by Hayes (2018) found that active response preparation mediated the effect of preparation time on interview performance, indirect effect = 0.21, confidence interval (CI) [0.11; 0.37] (cf. Figure 1).²

Hypothesis 3 stated that strain would mediate the relationship between preparation time and interview performance. However, in contrast to Hypothesis 3 there was no significant difference for strain between the two groups, $t(132) = 0.19$, $p = .85$ (cf. Table 3), and the mediation analyses did not reveal any mediating effect of strain for the relationship between preparation time and interview performance, indirect effect = 0.00, CI [-0.03; 0.02].

Next, Hypothesis 4 stated that using IM tactics would mediate the relationship between preparation time and interview

TABLE 2 Descriptive information and correlations for all variables in the main study

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Age	29.07	10.13	-										
2. Sex	0.34	0.47	.02	-									
3. Condition	0.51	0.50	.11	.04	-								
4. Interview performance	3.70	0.57	-.20*	.01	.33**	-							
5. Active response preparation	3.10	1.13	.07	.02	.52**	.44**	.54						
6. Strain	2.90	0.85	.14	-.26**	.02	-.03	.00	.87					
7. Honest IM	2.56	0.69	.00	.08	.27**	.04	.17	-.16	.71				
8. Deceptive IM	1.46	0.54	.08	.12	-.13	-.01	.04	.13	.14	.75			
9. GMA	31.81	8.20	-.33**	-.06	-.02	.22*	-.09	-.05	-.15	-.13	-		
10. Opportunity to perform	2.61	0.70	-.12	-.11	.07	.10	.15	-.42**	.34**	-.09	.16	.82	
11. Global Fairness	3.09	0.80	-.16	-.10	-.04	.04	.02	-.30*	.23**	.04	.17	.64**	.77

Note: N = 134. Sex was coded 0 = female, 1 = male; condition was coded 0 = without preparation time, 1 = with preparation time.

Values in the diagonal represent coefficient alpha.

Abbreviations: GMA, general mental ability; IM, impression management.

*p < .05; **p < .01.

performance. As can be seen in Table 3, preparation time led to more honest IM in the group with preparation time than in the group without preparation time. In contrast, at least descriptively the mean for deceptive IM was lower in the group with preparation time than in the other group. To evaluate the differences, we conducted a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with preparation time as the independent variable and honest and deceptive IM as dependent variables. We found a significant overall effect, Wilk's $\lambda = 0.90$, $F(2, 131) = 7.61$, $p < .001$, but post-hoc t tests only revealed a significant difference for honest IM, $t(132) = 3.26$, $p = .001$, but not for deceptive IM, $t(132) = -1.53$, $p = .13$. However, in contrast to Hypothesis 4, we neither found a mediating effect for honest IM, indirect effect = -0.02, CI [-0.08; 0.03], nor for deceptive IM, indirect effect = -0.01, CI [-0.05; 0.01].

Hypothesis 5 stated that preparation time would lead to higher fairness perceptions because participants would have a better chance to perform or to present themselves. Therefore, we conducted a MANOVA with the two subscales chance to perform and global fairness as the dependent variables (see Table 3). However, in contrast to Hypothesis 5, no significant overall effect was observed, Wilk's $\lambda = 0.98$, $F(2, 131) = 1.08$, $p = .34$.

In addition, we conducted four mediation analyses for the two fairness subscales and the two types of IM to examine Hypothesis 6. We found significant indirect effects via honest IM both on the opportunity to perform, indirect effect = 0.13, CI [0.04; 0.27], and on global fairness, indirect effect = 0.11, CI [0.02; 0.25]. In contrast, indirect effects via deceptive IM were neither significant for the opportunity to perform, indirect effect = 0.01, CI [-0.01; 0.08], nor for global fairness, indirect effect = -0.01, CI [-0.07; 0.03] (cf. Table 4). Hypothesis 6 was, therefore, only supported for honest IM.

TABLE 3 Means, standard deviations, and effect sizes for the dependent variables in the two experimental groups from the main study

	No preparation time (n = 66)		Preparation time (n = 68)		Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD	
Interview performance	3.51	0.53	3.88	0.55	0.68**
Active response preparation	2.51	0.87	3.67	1.28	1.06**
Strain	2.89	0.84	2.92	0.87	0.03
Impression management					
Honest	2.37	0.60	2.74	0.72	0.56**
Deceptive	1.53	0.56	1.39	0.52	-0.26
Fairness					
Opportunity to perform	2.56	0.66	2.65	0.73	0.17
Global fairness	3.12	0.77	3.06	0.83	-0.07

**p < .01.

3.3.3 | Additional analyses

As already mentioned, we found a significant correlation between the GMA scores and interview performance, $r = .21$, $p = .01$. When we considered this relationship separately for the two groups, we found that there was no significant relationship between GMA and performance ratings in the group without preparation time, $r = .15$, $p = .25$, whereas the relationship reached significance in the group with preparation time, $r = .32$, $p = .01$. However, there was no

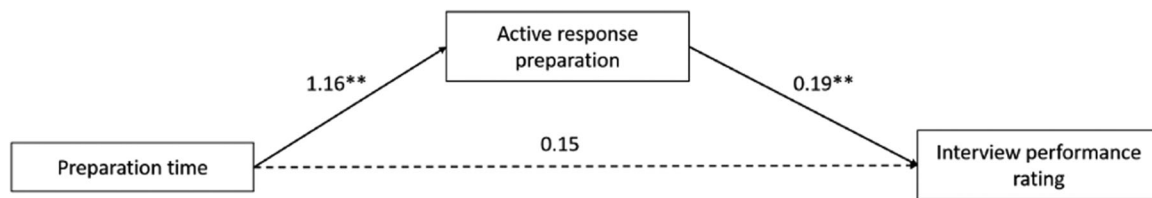


FIGURE 1 Mediation model and estimates according to the mediation postulated in Hypothesis 2. Values represent unstandardized regression weights

Mediation model	IE_{med}	SE_{Boot}	95% CI
Preparation time → active response preparation → interview performance	0.22	0.07	[0.09, 0.36]
Preparation time → strain → interview performance	-0.00	0.01	[-0.03, 0.02]
Preparation time → honest IM → interview performance	-0.02	0.03	[-0.08, 0.03]
Preparation time → deceptive IM → interview performance	-0.01	0.01	[-0.05, 0.01]
Preparation time → honest IM → opportunity to perform	0.13	0.06	[0.04, 0.27]
Preparation time → deceptive IM → opportunity to perform	0.01	0.02	[-0.01, 0.08]
Preparation time → honest IM → global fairness	0.11	0.06	[0.02, 0.25]
Preparation time → deceptive IM → global fairness	-0.01	0.02	[-0.07, 0.03]

TABLE 4 Results for the indirect paths of the different mediation analyses

Note: $N = 134$. The 95% CI for the effects was obtained by the bias-corrected bootstrap with 10,000 resamples.

Abbreviations: CI, confidence interval; IE_{med} , completely standardized indirect effect of the mediation; IM, impression management; SE_{Boot} , standard error of the bootstrapped effect sizes.

significant moderator effect of preparation time for the relationship between GMA and interview performance (Table 5).

Finally, we also explored another alternative explanation for better interview performance in the group with preparation time. Specifically, it could be that the longer preparation time and the enhanced response preparation eventually led to responses that were not only better but more elaborate and, therefore, longer. To evaluate this possibility, we additionally coded the length of participants' answers. We found a positive correlation between the length of participants' answers and interview performance ratings, $r = .39$, $p < .001$. However, answers were not longer in the group with preparation time ($M = 575.91$ s, $SD = 218.86$ s) than in the other group ($M = 561.41$ s, $SD = 221.18$ s), $t(132) = 0.38$, $p = .70$, $d = 0.07$.

4 | GENERAL DISCUSSION

The primary objective of our research was to examine the effect of preparation time on interview performance in AVIs. The results of both the pilot and the main study consistently showed that provision of preparation time in AVIs had a moderate to large effect on interview performance (Cohen's $d = 0.79$ in the pilot study and 0.68 in the main study). That is, interviewees who had 1 (main

study) or 2 min (pilot study) to prepare for their answers for each question received significantly better performance ratings than interviewees who only had time to read the respective questions. Moreover, we found that active response preparation significantly mediated the relationship between the provision of preparation time and interview performance ratings. These results have several theoretical implications.

First, the current study confirms previous suggestions by Langer et al. (2017) who presented a post-hoc explanation for better performances in AVIs as compared to synchronous interviews. Specifically, our results indeed confirm that the provision of preparation time is an important antecedent for better performance in AVIs. Thus, we contribute to a deeper understanding of factors that might contribute to performance differences between asynchronous versus synchronous interviews.

Second, we presented and tested several theoretically derived hypotheses as to how exactly preparation time might be beneficial for interview performance. Among the hypothesized mediating effects, only active response preparation yielded a significant indirect effect. In other words, most interviewees who were given preparation time in fact used their time wisely and as intended. However, our results provided no support for recent suggestions by Lukacik et al. (2020) that the provision of preparation time might alleviate strain or anxiety. This seems noteworthy in the present context because it

TABLE 5 Results for the moderator analyses concerning moderator effects of GMA on the effect of preparation time on interview performance

Predictor	β	R^2
Results for GMA		.16**
Preparation time	.33**	
GMA	.22**	
Preparation time \times GMA	.09	

Note: $N = 134$. Preparation time and GMA were centered prior to the calculation of the interaction term.

Abbreviations: GMA, general mental ability.

** $p < .01$.

might well have been possible that the trial interview questions from the platform provider created specific expectations regarding preparation time. For example, the preparation time of the trial interview was 3 min for the first question and 30 s for the second. Expecting at least 30 s and finally getting only 10 s should actually stress participants in the condition without preparation time and increase the difference in strain compared to the group with preparation time. In any case, however, it would be interesting for future research to investigate whether the strain level differs after the trial questions (and thus before the actual interview) and after the actual interview.

Third, we found no evidence for possible negative side effects of longer preparation time: Interviewees did not increase their performance through more deceptive IM. However, we observed more honest IM in the condition with preparation time, which is in line with research showing that the two forms of IM have different antecedents (e.g., Bill et al., 2020; Bourdage et al., 2018).

Fourth, although our studies were conducted in the context of AVIs, our findings may stimulate further research and theorizing for interviews in general. Specifically, it seems reasonable to assume that preparation time has a beneficial effect on performance in employment interviews in general. Thus, in line with advice from the interview training literature (e.g., Maurer et al., 1998), interviewees may take their time before responding to a question to take notes and to structure their thoughts even in FTF interviews.

Another interesting finding concerns the correlation of GMA and interview performance. On the one hand, we found no significant interaction between GMA and preparation time with regard to interview performance. On the other hand, the power for this interaction was limited given that our main goal was to test main effects. Nevertheless, the results point to an interesting possibility. Specifically, GMA only correlated significantly with interview performance in the group with preparation time whereas the correlation was not significant in the group without preparation time. Thus, it could be that preparation time allows interviewees to make better use of their GMA. Accordingly, this could be a first indication that AVIs with and without preparation time differ concerning their cognitive saturation, which might then in turn also affect their criterion-related validity.

With regard to interviewees' fairness perceptions, we found no evidence that preparation time affected these perceptions directly. This null effect might be due to the general skepticism towards AVIs (Basch, Melchers, Kegemann et al., 2020; Hiemstra et al., 2019; Langer et al., 2017). However, if one takes honest IM as a mediator into account, then there is support for an indirect effect of preparation time on fairness perceptions of AVIs, so that the provision of preparation time leads to more honest IM, which in turn leads to higher fairness perceptions. This result adds to previous findings from recent studies concerning the relationship between IM use and fairness perceptions in technology-mediated interviews (Basch, Melchers, Kegemann et al., 2020; Basch, Melchers, Kurz et al., 2020).

4.1 | Practical implications

Our results have several implications for applicants as well as for organizations. For applicants, it makes sense to use the preparation time in AVIs fully and actively. Applicants should, therefore, not terminate the preparation time earlier than necessary and should instead try to structure their answers logically and take notes of important issues that they want to cover in their answers. Additionally, they should also make use of the given response time, given that there was a positive relationship between answer length and interview performance ratings.

For organizations, our findings are also reassuring in that preparation time does not lead to more deceptive IM. Furthermore, if future research supports and extends the finding that AVIs correlate more strongly with GMA, it might even be worth to think about providing somewhat more preparation time to improve the criterion-related validity of the interview.

4.2 | Limitations and lines for future research

One limitation of our studies lies in the restriction to volunteer study participants in simulated interviews. The null effects concerning strain, deceptive IM, or fairness could be due to the low-stakes setting, in which interviewees did not feel the same pressure as in a high-stakes setting. Specifically, it may be that the lack of a real application context and the lack of incentives meant that interviewees had no reason to use deceptive IM. At this point, however, we want to mention that the generally rather low level of deceptive IM could also be due to the high level of structure in AVIs given that previous research suggests that structure reduces the amount and the impact of IM in interviews (Barrick et al., 2009) for both, deceptive IM (Levashina & Campion, 2007) as well as honest IM (Bourdage et al., 2018). Specifically, previous research found that standardization of the interview and of the evaluation process reduces the impact of IM (Barrick et al., 2009) and of other biasing factors (e.g., Kutcher & Bragger, 2004) on interview ratings. However, given that the provision of behavioral ratings anchors as a means to increase standardization contributes to the accuracy,

reliability, and validity of interview ratings (e.g., Huffcutt et al., 2013; Melchers et al., 2011; Taylor & Small, 2002), we followed best-practice recommendations (e.g., Campion et al., 1997; Taylor & Small, 2002) when we used a highly standardized evaluation process and behavioral rating anchors. Nevertheless, future research might also employ alternative and less standardized procedures that might be more prone to reveal effects of IM on interview performance (e.g., when raters only have to provide a single overall hireability rating at the end of the interview or ratings of more global aspects such as competence and warmth from the stereotype content model, Fiske et al., 2002).

With regard to strain during interviews, results from a recent study by Melchers et al. (2021) additionally suggest that interviewees might feel strained even in a low-stakes situation such as the present one. In that study, differences in affective reactions between technology-mediated interviews and FTF interviews were investigated and heart rate variability as a physiological indicator of strain was used. Although the study setting was similar (e.g., no incentives), heart rate variability was higher during the interview compared to a resting period before the interview. Thus, even in a low-stakes setting the interview situation seemed to have been perceived as stressful. Nevertheless, with regard to strain, it might be possible that restriction of variance may have occurred because participants with higher levels of interview anxiety were also more likely to opt out before the actual interview. However, an experiment with actual applicants in a high-stakes field setting would not have been ethically possible, given the expectation that this would lead to increased interview performance for the group with preparation time.

Another possible limitation concerning strain is our choice of our measurement. Specifically, it may be that the strain measure used for the main study was too general to capture the specific kind of strain during the interview and especially potential differences of state interview anxiety. Accordingly, future research should try to use alternative measures that are more specific for the interview context.

Given the limitations of our low-stakes setting, it would be desirable to supplement the initial evidence from the present research with data from actual applicants to clarify whether the predicted effects concerning strain and IM occur, when more personal relevance is added to the interview context. Furthermore, with regard to IM, high-stakes selection interviews usually also include more questions that allow for a fuller range of different forms of IM. Specifically, our IM measures did not include items concerning other-focused IM given that praise of an organization, for example, or attempts to improve fit with the organization were not possible in the current study because participants did not apply to a real organization. One option for future research with real applicants would be to use two different cohorts of applicants and to vary the preparation time that is provided so that the research design cannot negatively affect selection decisions in either cohort. In such an applicant sample, it might well be that the effects of preparation time are even stronger if applicants use the preparation time more intensively due to the high-stakes context. Furthermore, in such a context, one could also examine the predicted mediation effect of strain again because it may be that the

interview situation in our main study was not sufficiently stressful for the participants. In a high-stakes field setting, however, it seems plausible that strain and anxiety are higher and that preparation time could alleviate them (Lukacik et al., 2020).

An alternative to using a high-stakes setting to investigate the role of strain would be to use a within-subjects design. Specifically, if small intraindividual effects of preparation time on strain are masked by larger interindividual differences concerning participants' strain and interview anxiety, then a within-subjects design might be helpful to evaluate the effects on the strain. Furthermore, such research could also vary the length of preparation time more systematically, to see, for example, whether the beneficial effect of the preparation is linear or levels off at some point. In addition, our choice of the minimum time of only 16 s of preparation time does probably not reflect common practice in AVIs. Therefore, future research could also investigate the effects of varying preparation time when the experimental group with less preparation time is provided not only with the minimum that can be set in the default but with preparation time that is used in practice (e.g., 30 s). Additional research is also needed to evaluate whether the higher performance ratings in AVIs compared to FTF interviews or video-conference interviews (cf. Castro & Gramzow, 2015; Langer et al., 2017) are really only due to preparation time in AVIs. Given the restrictions of media richness (Daft & Lengel, 1986) and social presence (Short et al., 1976), performance in AVIs should actually be worse than in interviews with direct interaction between interviewees and interviewers. Thus, future research should also investigate whether the predicted performance differences with higher interview performance in FTF or videoconference interviews can be found if no preparation time is provided in AVIs.

A final limitation of the present study concerns the potential effect of preparation time on criterion-related validity that we could not investigate. Further research is definitely needed here. Given the interesting correlational results in the main study concerning the relationship between GMA and interview performance, it might also be possible that the potential difference concerning the construct-related validity of the AVI is also paralleled by a difference concerning criterion-related validity. However, to investigate these differences, larger samples are needed. Furthermore, the use of larger samples would also allow to test the mediator and moderator effects from the main study with more power.

4.3 | Conclusions

The use of AVIs has increased considerably during recent years so that it is important to develop a better understanding of how aspects of AVIs influence performance in and perceptions of this new type of interview (Lukacik et al., 2020). In this regard, the present research provides the first step, confirmed previous assumptions about the impact of preparation time on performance in AVIs, and also supported one of several possible mediators. However, more research is definitely needed to gain more insight into the effects of other features of AVIs to be able to provide informed advice both to

organizations that want to use AVIs as well as to applicants who have to complete an AVI.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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ENDNOTES

¹There were no differences between the participants who dropped out and those in the final sample concerning age, sex, weekly working hours, or interview experience, all $F_s < 2.52$, all $p_s > .11$.

²Given the relatively low internal consistency of the two-item measure for active response preparation, we also repeated the mediation analyses separately for each of the two items. The indirect effect in these separate analyses was stronger for the item related to "taking notes" (indirect effect = 0.20, CI [0.08, 0.33]) than for the item related to "structuring answers" (indirect effect = 0.08, CI [0.02, 0.18]). However, given that both indirect effects were significant, the qualitative pattern of results did not depend on one item alone from the two-item measure.

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APPENDIX A

TABLE A1

Items used for the main study		Source
Postinterview questionnaire		
Active response preparation	I actively used the preparation time to take notes for answering the interview questions	Self-developed
	I actively used the preparation time to consider the most important points for my answer	
Strain	Tense—at ease	Müller and Basler (1993)
	Relaxed—uneasy	
	Concerned—unconcerned	
	Calm—restless	
	Skeptical—trustful	
	Comfortable—uncomfortable	
Impression management—honest	Self-promotion:	Roulin and Bourdage (2017)
	I made sure to inform about my job credentials	
	I made sure to talk about my skills and abilities	
	I talked about my past work experience to emphasize my competence	
	Defensive:	
	I recounted steps I had taken to prevent the recurrence of negative events or occurrences in my past	
	I shared my past regrets about how I handled certain situations, and how I would improve in the future	
I gave reasons why I felt I benefited positively from a negative event I was responsible for		
Impression management—deceptive	Slight image creation:	Roulin and Bourdage (2017)
	I exaggerated my responsibilities on my previous jobs	
	I distorted my answers to emphasize what the interview questions were looking for	
	Extensive image creation:	
	I made up stories about my work experiences that were well developed and logical	
	I invented some work situations or accomplishments that did not really occur	
When I did not have a good answer, I borrowed work experiences of other people and made them sound like my own		
Fairness perceptions	Job-relatedness:	Bauer et al. (2001)
	I could really show my skills and abilities in this interview	
	This interview allowed me to show what my job skills are	
	This interview gives applicants the opportunity to show what they can really do	
	I was be able to show what I can in this interview	
	Global fairness:	
	I think that this interview is a fair way to select people for the job I have in mind	
I think that the interview itself is fair		