Medical Student Perceptions Comparing In-Person to Virtual Interviews in the Medical School Admissions Process

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Introduction

At the Wayne State University School of Medicine (WSUSOM), prospective medical school applicants are interviewed using three interview modalities: one faculty/alumni interview, one medical student interview, and five multiple-mini-interviews. Following COVID-19 induced institutional protocols in 2020, WSUSOM transitioned from choosing to interview in-person to adopting a virtual format.

In order to better understand how medical student interviewers viewed this transition, surveys were administered to those who conducted both in-person interviews (IPI) and virtual interviews (VI).

The objective of this study is to identify and analyze student perceptions of IPI and VI.

Methods

This prospective, mixed methods study surveyed (n=24) and enrolled (n=10) medical student interviewers based on their participation prior to and during the COVID-19 induced protocols, which included both current medical students and medical graduates within the past year.

The voluntary online survey assessed:

- Self-reported demographics
- Preparation of the interviewer for virtual interviews considering the in-person training received, the support of the Office of Admissions, student leadership
- Preference of IPI or VI
- Evaluation and assessment of interviewees during both IPI and VI

These metrics were measured using a Likert scale from 1 (most negative) to 5 (most positive). The mean data were analyzed via a two-tailed, paired t-test to compare group means obtained from virtual and in-person Likert scores.

Respondents also described benefits and limitations using free text response to further explore participants' preference of IPI and/or VI.

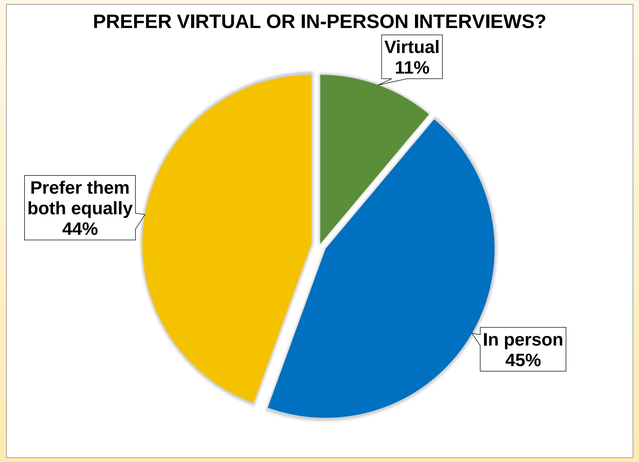
Results

PREPARATION:

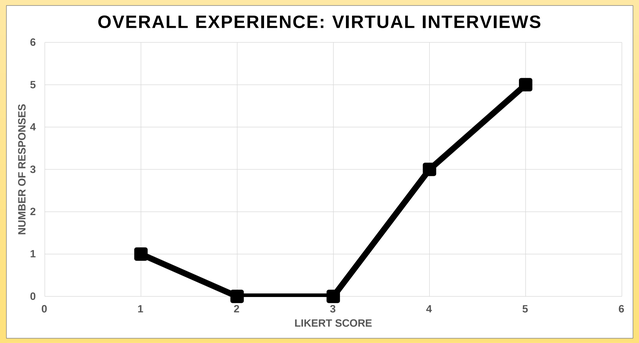
Survey participants rated preparation for virtual interviews **3.36** (SD=1.03). Comparing the support received during IPI and VI, participants reported more support during in-person interviews ($\bar{x}$**=4.33**) than during virtual interviews ($\bar{x}$**=3.67**), p=0.08.

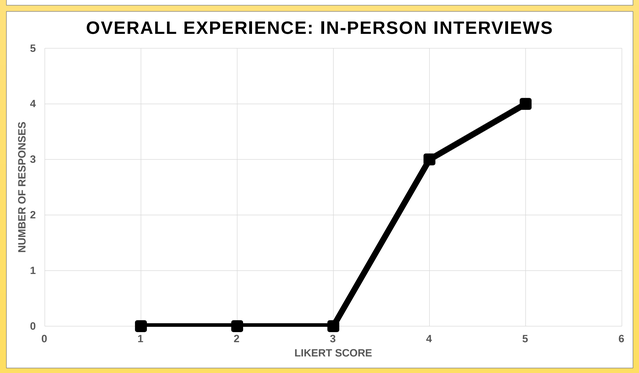
PREFERENCE:

- Of the participants enrolled, 45% preferred IPI, 44% had no preference, and 11% preferred VI.



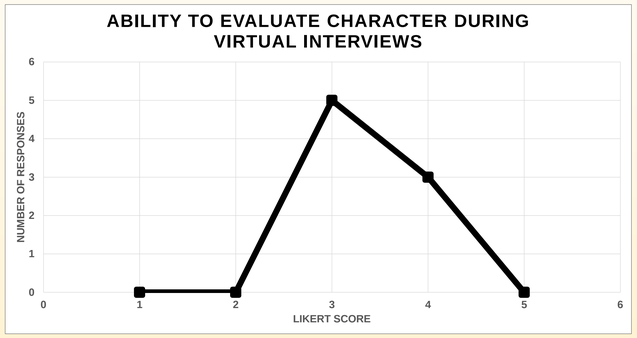
- The overall experience of VI compared to IPI was rated **4.20 and 4.50** respectively (p=0.08).

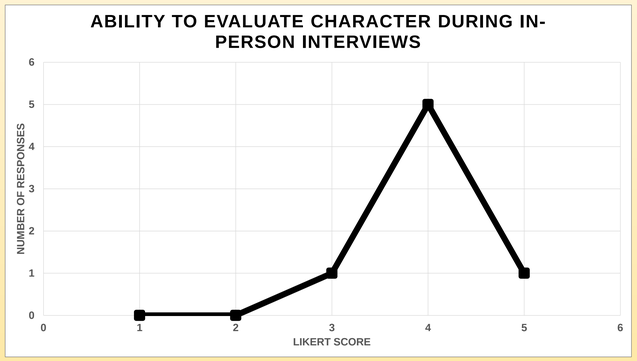




EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT:

- Ability to assess overall applicant character was rated **3.33 and 4.00 for VI and IPI** respectively (p=0.01).





- Ability to assess applicant emotional intelligence was rated **3.56 and 4.38** for VI and IPI respectively (p=0.047).
- Ability to assess applicant ethical responsibility was rated **3.67 and 3.88** for VI and IPI respectively (p=0.598).

BENEFITS AND LIMITATIONS:

Free text responses regarding the benefits and limitations of VI and IPI were reviewed and analyzed based on major themes:

BENEFITS OF IPI:
- Holistic evaluation (n=5)
- Meet cohort of interviewers (n=2)

LIMITATIONS OF IPI:
- Travel (n=5)
- Logistics/Scheduling (n=4)
- Transportation/Parking (n=3)

BENEFITS OF VI:
- Convenience/flexibility (n=6)
- Less travel (n=3)

LIMITATIONS OF VI:
- Access to quiet area (n=3)
- Technology issues (n=3)
- Lack of personal touch (n=1)

Discussion

Although the "benefit of convenience" in VI was highly reported, the benefits of IPI, as a better assessment of character and building rapport, was considered more significant. Additionally, interviewers were able to better assess multiple parameters of an applicant and the interview in person. Therefore, the option of in-person interviewing for medical school admissions is perceived to elicit a better experience.

It has been noted that the p-values of some of the results collected, such as support during IPI vs VI, overall experience of both interviewing methods, and ability to assess ethical responsibility in each interview type was not significant.

Future Implications

Further studies may consider applicant perceptions of the virtual format, faculty perceptions of the virtual interview environment compared to in-person interviews, as well as the efficacy of a virtual format for residency interviews.

References

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