

Using Avatar-Based Training Simulations to Improve the Quality of Simulated Asylum Interviews among Novice Interviewers

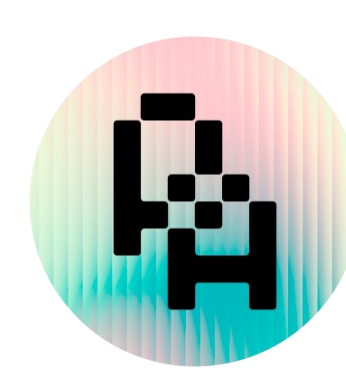
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INTRODUCTION

- I. Most asylum interviewing officials from Finland recognized the importance of appropriate questioning strategies and rapport with the applicant during the interview. However, they mentioned that implementing them in practice was often **challenging** (Skrifvars & Korkman, 2026).
- II. Avatar-based training simulations with feedback have shown promising effects (e.g., Pompedda et al., 2022; Tohvelmann et al., 2025).
- III. Haginoya et al. (2025) found a potential trade-off when novice interviewers were trained in two skills simultaneously (i.e., question formulation and supportive statements), compared with training focused on a single skill.

Research Question and Hypotheses

Can avatar-based training simulations, combined with individualized feedback, enhance **both question type (QT) and verbal rapport-building skill (RBS) of novice interviewers** in asylum interview settings?

H1: Recommended questions: QT and QT+RBS > RBS and Control;

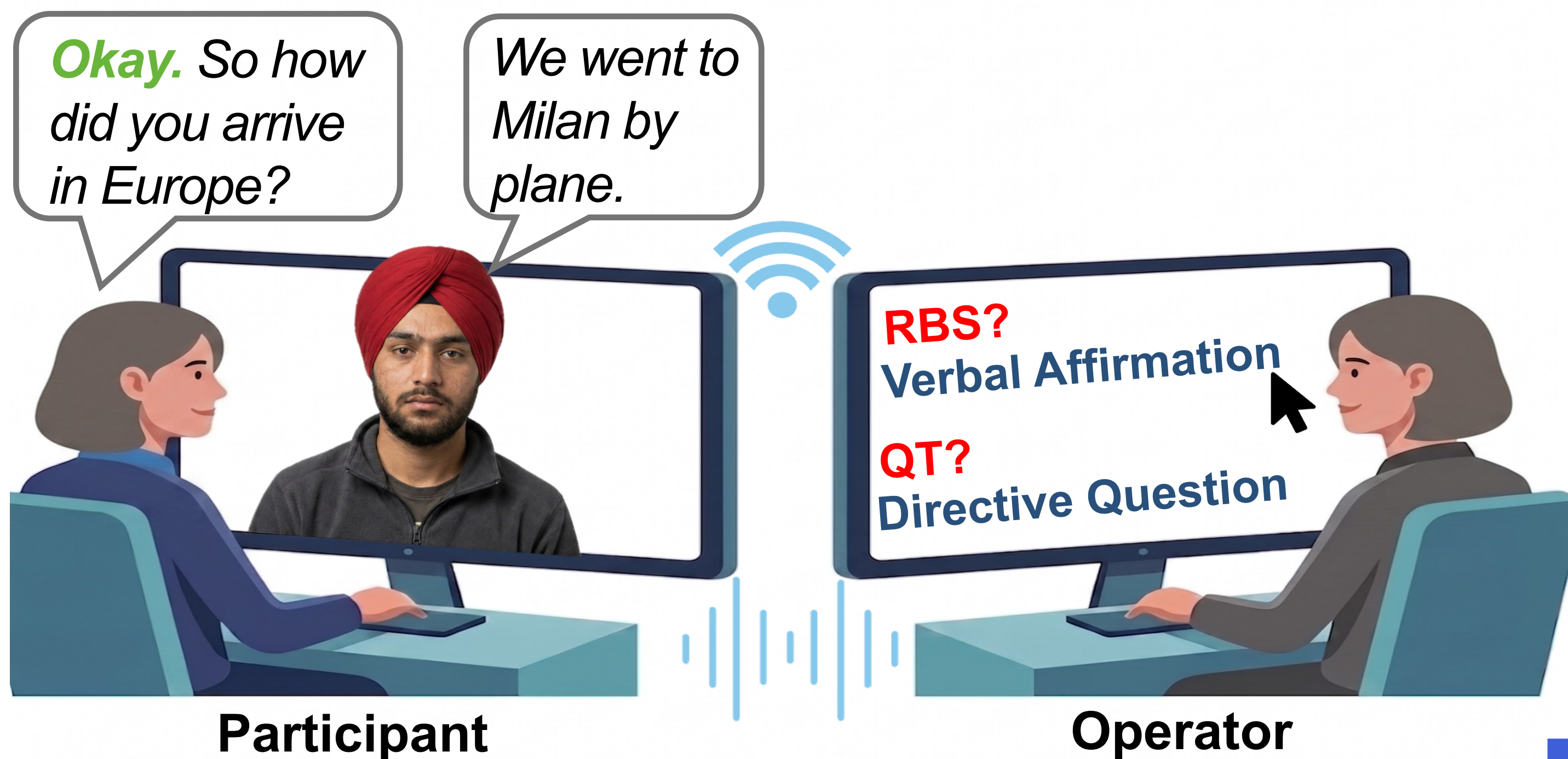
Trade-off in Combined Feedback: QT > QT+RBS

H2: Verbal rapport-building skills: RBS and QT+RBS > QT and Control;

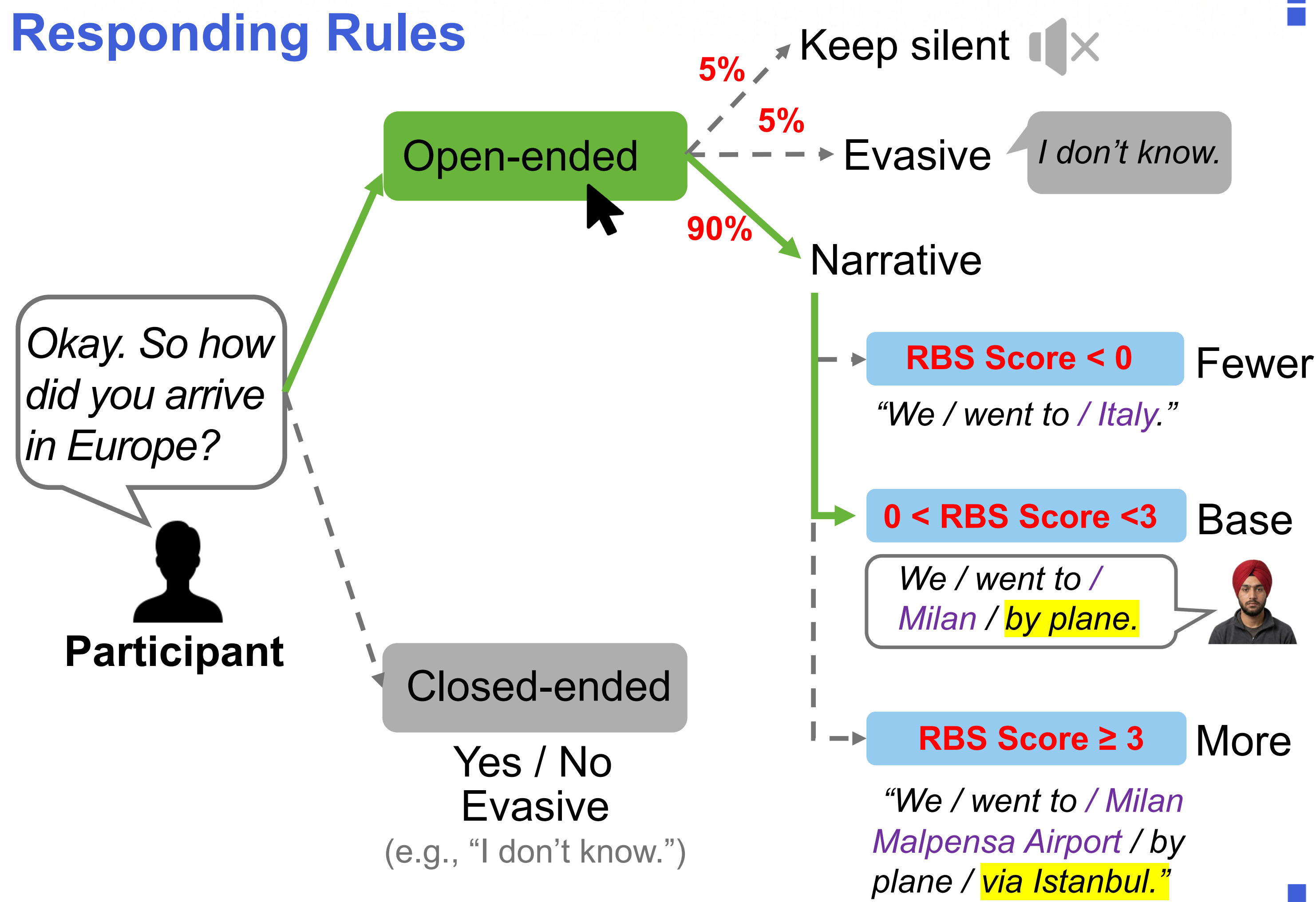
Trade-off in Combined Feedback: RBS > QT+RBS

METHODS

Avatar Training

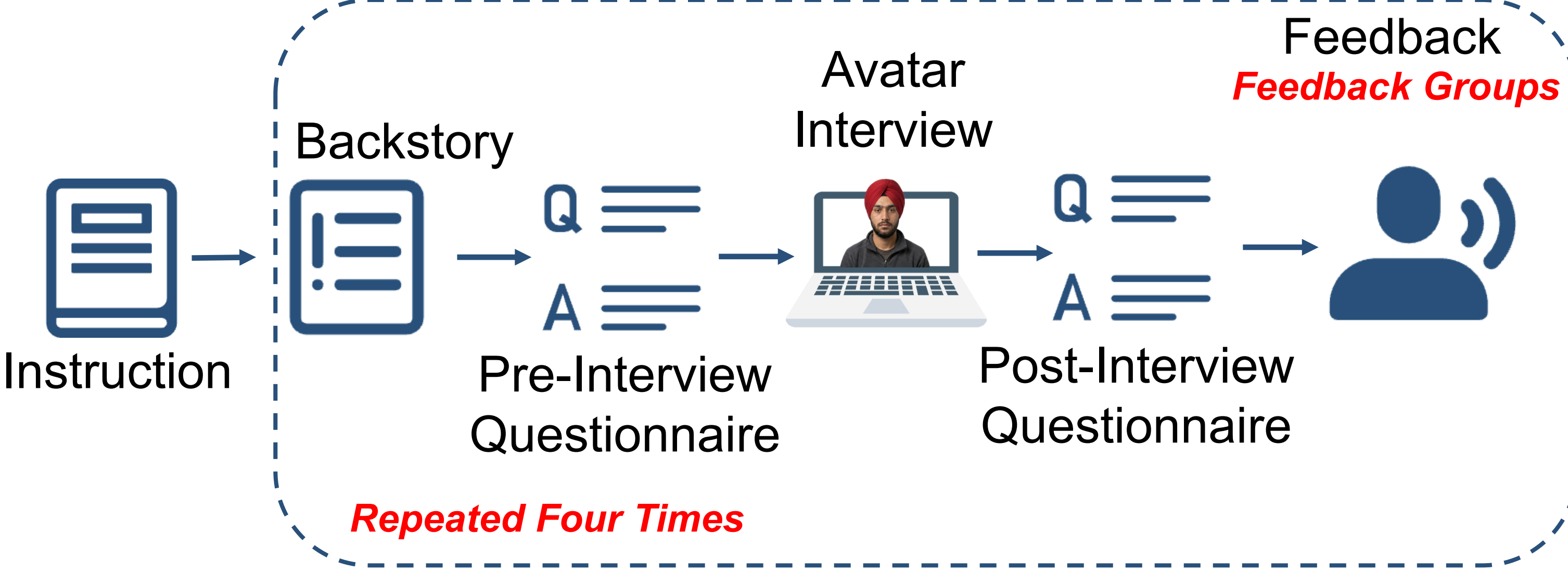


Responding Rules



Procedures

The experiment was conducted in English



REFERENCES

Haginoya, S., Sun, Y., Yamamoto, S., Mizushi, H., Yoshimoto, N., & Santtila, P. (2025). Improving questioning skills and use of supportive statements in simulated child sexual abuse interviews. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 39(1), e70031.
Skrifvars, J., & Korkman, J. (2026). Field reflections from training Finnish asylum officials. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 39(2), 464-472.
Tohvelmann, M. L., Kask, K., Palu, A., Haginoya, S., & Santtila, P. (2025). Providing feedback in simulated investigative interviews with adult witness avatars increases the use of free recall and open questions. *International Journal of Police Science & Management*, 27(2), 182-198.
Pompedda, F., Zhang, Y., Haginoya, S., & Santtila, P. (2022). A mega-analysis of the effects of feedback on the quality of simulated child sexual abuse interviews with avatars. *Journal of police and criminal psychology*, 37(3), 485-498.

Participants and Experimental Groups

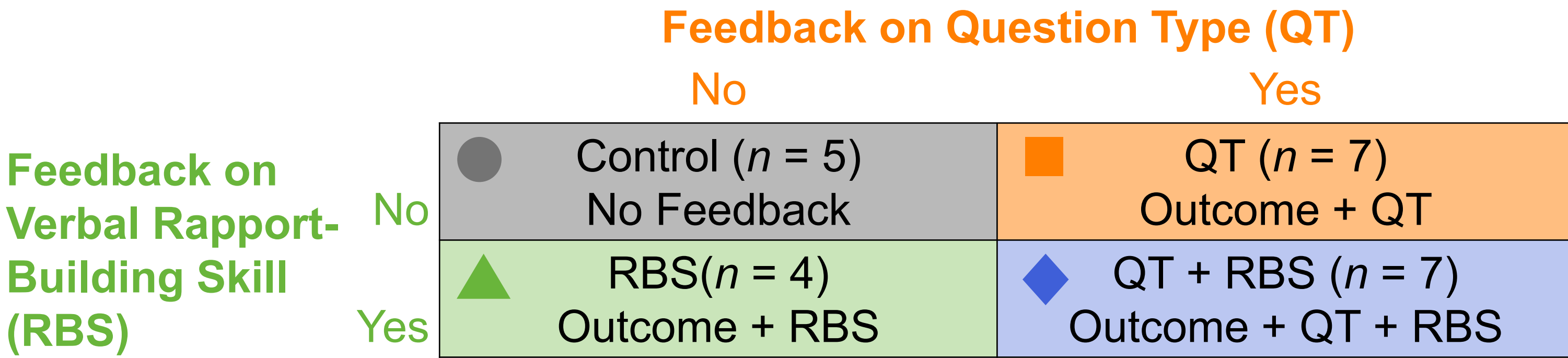
Participants were randomly allocated to one of four groups and completed four interviews. Twenty-two interviewers were included in the preliminary analysis ($M_{age} = 25.7$, $SD = 3.85$; *Targeted N* = 48).

I. **Control** = no feedback

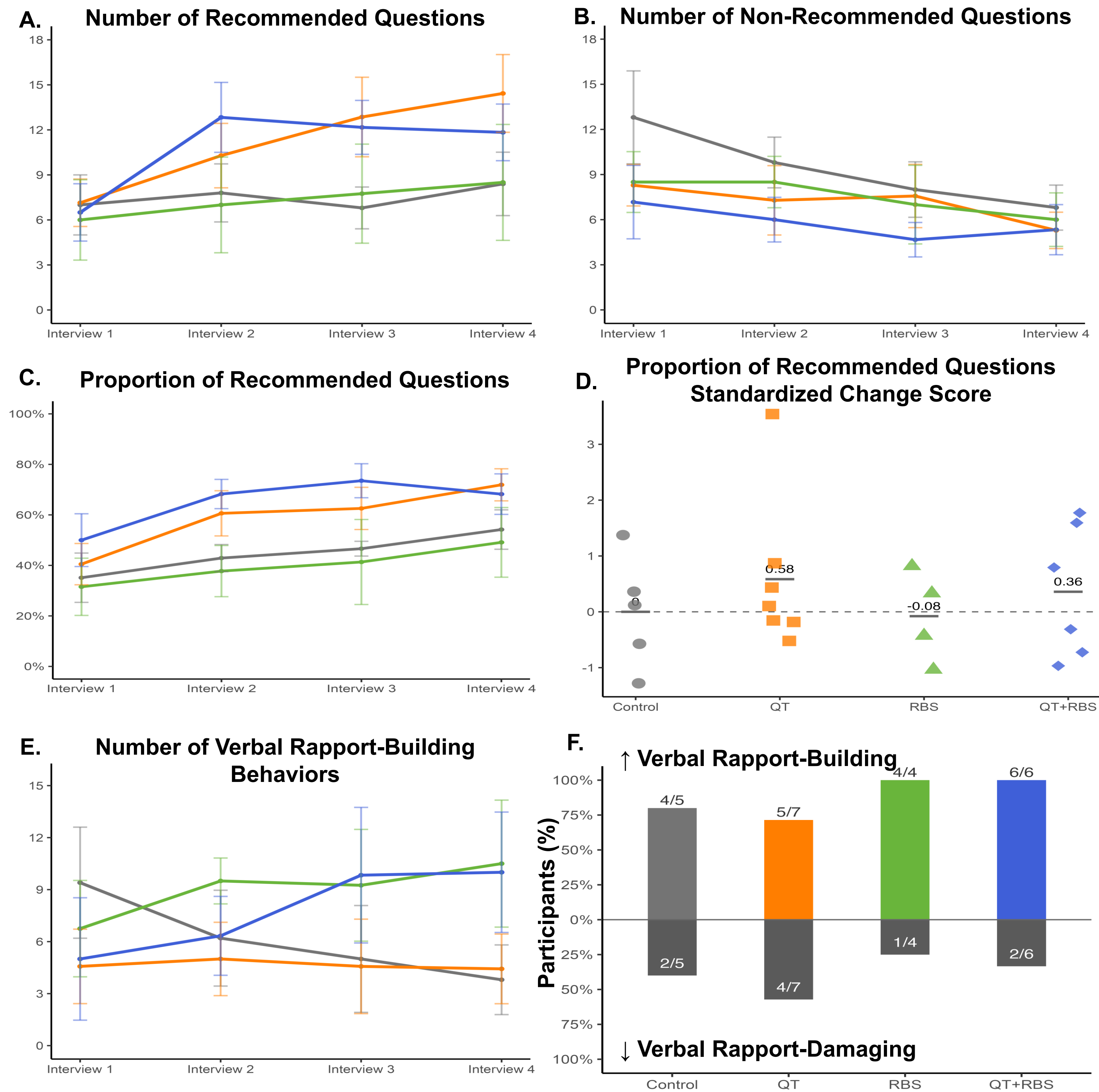
II. **QT** = case-outcome + feedback on question-type

III. **RBS** = case-outcome + feedback on verbal rapport-building-skill

IV. **QT+RBS** = case-outcome + combined feedback on both aspects



RESULTS



Note. Panels A, B, C, and E were created based on the *M* and *SE* for dependent variables in each experimental group. Panel D shows the standardized difference between each participant's proportion of recommended questions and the mean proportion of the control group. Each dot represents one participant. Panel F shows the number and proportion of participants in each experimental group who used rapport-building or/and rapport-damaging behaviors.

Number of Recommended Questions, <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)					Number of Non-Recommended Questions, <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)				
	Interview 1	2	3	4		1	2	3	4
Control	7.0(4.5)	7.8(4.3)	6.8(3.1)	8.4(4.7)		12.8(6.9)	9.8(3.8)	8.0(4.1)	6.8(3.3)
QT	7.1(4.2)	10.3(5.7)	12.9(7.0)	14.4(6.9)		8.3(3.6)	7.3(6.1)	7.6(5.6)	5.3(3.2)
RBS	6.0(5.4)	7.0(6.4)	7.8(6.6)	8.5(7.7)		8.5(4.0)	8.5(3.4)	7.0(5.2)	6.0(3.6)
QT+RBS	6.5(4.7)	12.8(5.7)	12.2(4.4)	11.8(4.6)		7.2(6.0)	6.0(3.6)	4.7(2.8)	5.3(4.1)

Proportion of Recommended Questions, <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)					Number of Rapport-Building Behaviors, <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)				
	Interview 1	2	3	4		1	2	3	4
Control	35.1(21.8)	42.9(12.0)	46.6(6.5)	54.2(17.4)		9.4(7.2)	6.2(6.2)	5.0(6.9)	3.8(4.5)
QT	40.5(21.6)	60.6(23.7)	62.6(22.1)	71.9(16.8)		4.6(5.7)	5.0(5.6)	4.6(7.2)	4.4(5.3)
RBS	31.5(22.7)	37.7(20.3)	41.3(33.7)	49.1(27.6)		6.8(5.6)	9.5(2.6)	9.2(6.4)	10.5(7.3)
QT+RBS	50.0(25.6)	68.3(14.2)	73.5(16.5)	68.2(19.6)		5.0(8.6)	6.3(5.6)	9.8(9.6)	10.0(8.5)

Discussion

As data collection is ongoing, no hypothesis testing has been conducted yet. Descriptive visualizations suggested that:

- I. Feedback + Avatar Training appeared to be associated with greater use of recommended questions and verbal rapport-building behaviors than the no-feedback groups.
- II. QT+RBS showed slightly less use of recommended questions than QT in Interviews 3-4. **Increased cognitive load and potential fatigue?**
- III. Even without feedback, participants appeared to improve in question formulation over repeated interviews. **Practice effect?**

Limitations

- I. **Simplified QT response rules:** limited empirical evidence
- II. **Simplified RBS response rules:** weighted all behaviors equally