

Energy-Saving Competition Among Young Children

By Associate Professor Leonard Lee

COMPETITION-BASED ENERGY CAMPAIGN TARGETED AT CHILDREN

- Associate Professor Lee in his research, explored the possibility of using behavioural interventions to reduce electricity and water consumption at the household level. Specifically, his team launched an energy campaign targeted at Primary 4/5 children after noticing that most energy campaigns targeted at adults were ineffective at changing household behaviour. The team believed there were two-fold benefits of such a campaign: (1) children could significantly influence their parents' behaviours; and (2) knowledge acquired during childhood might create long-term positive impact on future energy savings.
- The WE-Hero Campaign, a competition-based intervention programme targeting young children to maximise their influence in affecting energy consumption in their households, was launched in 2018. Participating students were required to attend four workshops on energy-conservation and winners of the energy-saving competition would be selected at the end of the 4-month campaign. Associate Professor Lee hypothesized that such competition would spur children's desire to conserve energy at home, and the energy-conservation knowledge they acquired in the workshop would permeate to their families.
- Participants were randomly assigned to one of the following conditions:
 - (i) Control Group: Workshops without competition
 - (ii) Social/Public Condition: Certificates were publicly awarded to the winners in school
 - (iii) Financial/Public Condition: Vouchers were publicly awarded to the winners in school
 - (iv) Financial/Private Condition: Vouchers were privately awarded to the winners via email
- Qualitative and quantitative data of the WE-Hero Campaign are still being analysed. However, preliminary analyses suggested that 'public recognition' enhanced the effectiveness of such a competition-based intervention programme. Furthermore, social rewards were more effective when it came to habit formation for both water and electricity conservation:
 - (i) Social/Public Condition and Financial Public Condition: 'Competition effect' reduced both water and electricity consumption during the intervention period.
 - (ii) Financial/Public Condition: Participants continued to reduce water consumption during the post-intervention period.
 - (iii) Social/Public Condition: Participants continued to reduce both water and electricity consumption during the post-intervention period.