



**SLEUK RITH INSTITUTE**  
A Permanent Documentation Center of Cambodia  
66 Preah Sihanouk Blvd | Phnom Penh  
+855 23 21 18 75 | [www.cambodiasri.org](http://www.cambodiasri.org)

# **GENOCIDE EDUCATION IN CAMBODIA**

## **DEMOCRATIC KAMPUCHEA HISTORY EDUCATION**

### **REPORT**

**CLASSROOM FORUM ON THE IMPORTANCE OF STUDYING THE  
HISTORY OF DEMOCRATIC KAMPUCHEA (1975-1979)**

**CHAK ANG-RE HIGH SCHOOL**

**19 MAY 2016**

**TEAM:**

PHENG PONG-RASY

MIN SANAS

NHEAN SOCHEAT

SENG KUNTHY

SURA BEZHAN



## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	3
Introduction .....	4
Methodology .....	5
I. Pre-Forum Survey .....	5
II. Students' Questions (W-Chart).....	5
III. Film Screening: Tuol Sleng Prison.....	6
IV. Questions Answered (L-Chart).....	7
V. Importance of Learning DK History .....	7
VI. Post-Forum Survey .....	7
VII. Distribution of DK Textbook.....	8
Observations.....	8
Results.....	9
I. Pre-Forum Survey .....	9
II. Post-Forum Survey .....	11
Discussion of Results.....	16
Conclusions.....	17
Recommendations .....	18

## Abstract

The Genocide Education Program seeks to establish a genocide education curriculum across all high schools in Cambodia and distribute *A History of Democratic Kampuchea 1975-1979* textbook, which was published by the Documentation Center of Cambodia with the assistance of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport. In order to establish a foundation for genocide education, forums are initially held at each high school to give them their first lesson on Democratic Kampuchea history. On May 19<sup>th</sup> 2016, Mr. Pheng Pong Rasy and Ms. Sanas Min went to Chak Ang-Re High School to conduct a forum for 70 students all in grade twelve. The aim of the forum was to help students gain a better understanding of the Democratic Kampuchea era and think about the lessons they can learn from Cambodia's past so as to enhance the nation's prospects in the future.



Grade-12 students from Chak Ang-Re High School listen to a presentation of a brief DK history.  
Photo: Nhean Socheat, May 19, 2016

## Introduction

On May 19<sup>th</sup> 2016, the Documentation Center of Cambodia with the support of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, conducted another school forum as part of its Genocide Education Program at Chak Ang-Re High School. Having been told to expect between 40 and 50 students, it was a pleasant surprise to see 70 students from grade twelve present for the forum conducted by Mr. Pheng Pong-Rasy, the Coordinator for the Genocide Education Project. Due to the lack of prior warning regarding the larger turnout, only 57 pre- and post- surveys were available for the students to complete. Of the 57 who were surveyed, 33 were female and 24 were male.

In a change from previous forums and upon the request of the Principal, Mr. Pheng Pong-Rasy altered the structure of the class to incorporate more questions from students. As a result, the KWL chart was not used in full (only the 'W' and 'L' elements were) and instead Mr. Rasy allotted 15 minutes for students to ask whatever questions they wished to have answered. The rest of the elements of the forum remained similar to past sessions, as will be further discussed in the Methodology section.

The forum aimed to help 70 Grade Twelve students from Chak Ang-Re High School gain a solid understanding of Democratic Kampuchea history. Moreover, it intended to demonstrate to the students the importance of learning about Cambodia's difficult past as a way to promote peace, reconciliation, healing and, ultimately, prevention of genocide in the future. Through open dialogue and engaging content, the forum encouraged the students to think critically about DK history. Finally, the forum provided all present students with the *A History of Democratic Kampuchea 1975-1979* textbook in a bid to inspire further research and deeper understanding.

As an overarching goal, the Genocide Education Program aspires to lead the development of a sufficient framework and curriculum for studying Democratic Kampuchea history within schools.

## Methodology

Throughout the high school forums, four main practices were used including two surveys (pre-survey and post-survey), a KWL chart, a silent video on Tuol Sleng Prison and

PowerPoint slides throughout the learning part of the forum. However, as discussed earlier, due to the wishes of the Principal, Mr. Rasy altered the structure of the class to include greater opportunity for students to ask questions. Because of this, the entire KWL chart and PowerPoint slides were not used. Instead, 15 minutes were given for students to ask questions (W Chart), and Mr. Rasy spent one hour answering each question in turn (L Chart).

### I. Pre-Forum Survey

At the beginning of the forum, 57 surveys were handed out to students so as to test their level of knowledge on DK history prior to the session. The questions focused on whether students had spoken to their parents about the Khmer Rouge period, whether they believed it is important to study DK history, whether it should be taught in schools, and whether students would discriminate against children of perpetrators. Students had fifteen minutes to complete this survey.

### II. Students' Questions (W-Chart)

After the surveys were completed and collected, Mr. Rasy gave the students 15 minutes to ask whatever questions they were keen to have answered about the DK period. This constituted the W-Chart as it highlighted 'What Students *Want* to Learn.' The W-Chart allows students to think more actively about the subject matter and engage with the core issues presented. Likewise, it helps students set personal objectives for the forum. Mr. Rasy provided an open platform and proceeded to write down each question on the whiteboard in order, so he could answer them in turn after the screening of the silent film. The students asked a total of 15 questions. 7 were asked by male students and 8 were asked by female students. The questions were:

1. *Why weren't top Khmer Rouge leaders held responsible for what they had done?*
2. *Why did the Khmer Rouge kill intellectuals?*
3. *What did the Khmer Rouge regime exist?*
4. *What were the advantages of the Khmer Rouge regime?*
5. *Why did the Khmer Rouge establish cooperative units?*
6. *Why did they force people to overwork?*
7. *Why didn't people at the time fight back against the regime?*

8. *How has the aftermath of the regime affected Cambodian society today?*
9. *Why did the Khmer Rouge regime use physical force on people (to farm)?*
10. *Was the ECCC created for political gain?*
11. *Why did the regime feed the Cambodian people so poorly?*
12. *Why did the Khmer Rouge force the evacuation of people from cities?*
13. *Why has the ECCC taken so long to prosecute Khmer Rouge leaders?*
14. *Why didn't the Government bring the top Khmer Rouge leaders to the ICC?*
15. *Why did all the Khmer Rouge people dress in black and what is the meaning?*

### III. Film Screening: Tuol Sleng Prison

Following the student's questions (W-Chart), the learning part of the forum began with Mr. Pheng Pong-Rasy exposing students to the horrors that occurred in Prison S-21 (also known as Tuol Sleng Prison) via a silent video. The film exposes the brutality and inhumanity of the prison – it explains how men, women and children were tortured and killed. The use of images helps students better visualize the terror of the Khmer Rouge. The showing of dead corpses, malnutrition and starving children evokes an emotive and uncomfortable response amongst students, which allows them to engage more pertinently with the issues at hand.

### IV. Questions Answered (L-Chart)

In this section of the forum, Mr. Rasy systematically answered each of the 15 questions asked by students. He spent one hour in total, going into great detail to address each query. Before he began his answers, he provided a brief background into the key leaders of the Khmer Rouge and quizzed students on whether they knew who they were. He also introduced the ECCC and described what the tribunal has accused the regime of. After this overview, he responded to the students' questions. This constituted the L-Chart as it underlined 'What Students' *Learned*.'

### V. Importance of Learning DK History

Following the L-Chart, Mr. Rasy provided three main reasons why it is important for students to learn about DK history:

1. *It deepens the understanding of human rights by portraying a period in which rights were violated.*

2. *It is crucial to preventing the occurrence of genocide in the future as it promotes reconciliation and peace-building.*
3. *In order for Cambodia to build a prosperous future, it must learn and understand the mistakes of its past.*

## VI. Post-Forum Survey

Post-forum surveys measured the students' level of knowledge after the learning section of the forum. The survey asked students whether they believe mass atrocities took place, whether it is important to study DK history and whether they would discriminate against an individual if they found out their parent was a perpetrator. These questions were the same as the pre-forum survey. Additionally, the post-forum survey asked students how they now felt about promoting peace, healing, reconciliation and the prevention of future genocide in Cambodia.

The post-forum survey also assessed how students feel about studying DK history and which topics of DK history are the most important for them to learn about within school curriculum.

## VII. Distribution of DK Textbook

At the end of the forum, all present students were provided with the *A History of Democratic Kampuchea 1975-1979* textbook in a bid to inspire further research and deeper understanding. Students were urged to read the textbook and to think critically about its content.

## Observations

The class was energetic and vocal, particularly early on in the forum. As a result, there was a real dynamism in the room which Mr. Rasy fed off. Mr. Rasy built a good rapport with the group as they replied to his questions (as well as jokes) and were comfortable speaking candidly. The students were attentive, active in their thinking and responsive to the content. The group was not shy to ask questions, with both the male students and female students speaking throughout the forum. As is clear from the questions the students asked, they demonstrated a basic knowledge of the DK period and the ECCC, but were keen to learn

about these topics in greater depth. It was clear that the silent film of Tuol Sleng Prison moved the students, as they watched it quietly with the occasional comment to their neighbor. Such was the curiosity of the students, one even asked Mr. Rasy for his contact details so as to keep in touch in case they had any more questions to ask.

As the session continued however, some of that early energy and enthusiasm dissipated, particularly when Mr. Rasy proceeded to answer the questions in turn. Students who had not asked a question were less interested in the answers and so began to be disruptive and talkative. Having said this, on the whole the group was very impressive, specifically in the way they engaged with the difficult content and were keen to learn more for the majority of the forum.

## Results

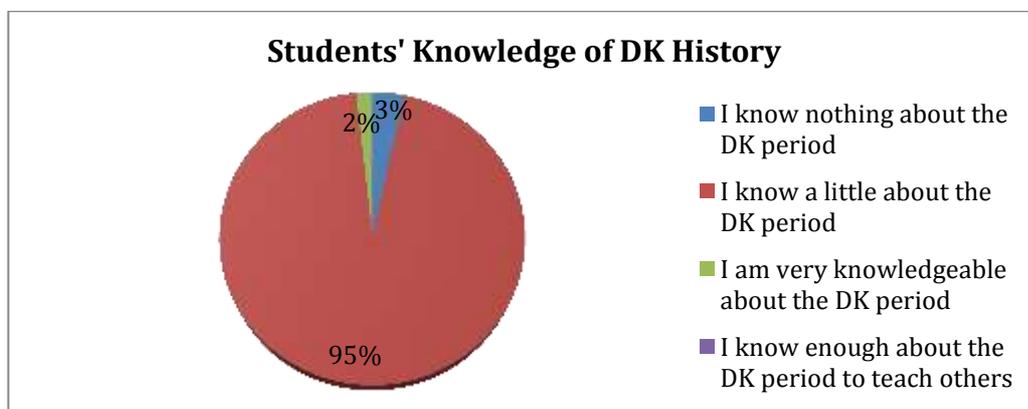
All the results from the pre-forum surveys and the post-forum surveys have been compiled into graphs and pie charts using Microsoft Excel. As discussed earlier, although there were 70 students present at the forum, only 57 of them were surveyed before and after the session due to a shortage of surveys to cover the unexpected class size.

Four questions were kept the same across both surveys, so as to compare the difference the forum made to the students' knowledge on DK history.

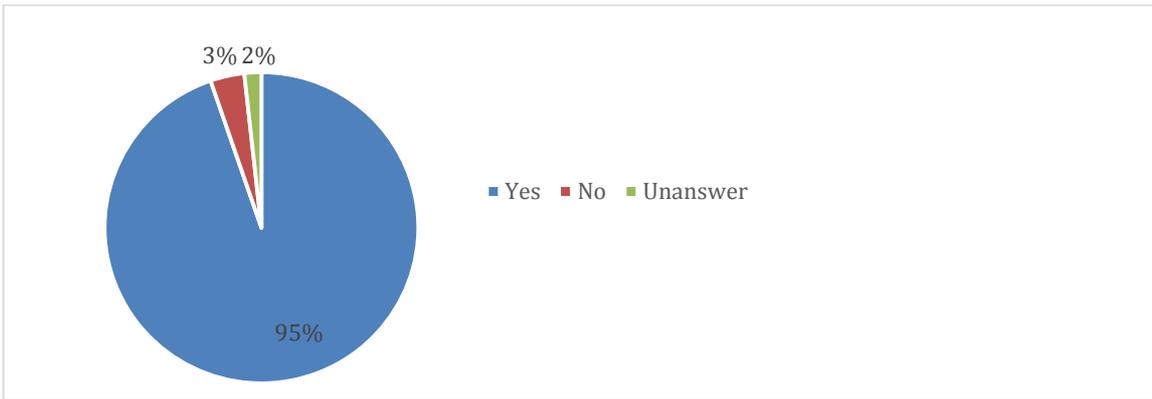
### I. Pre-Forum Survey

Six questions were asked in this survey. These questions were:

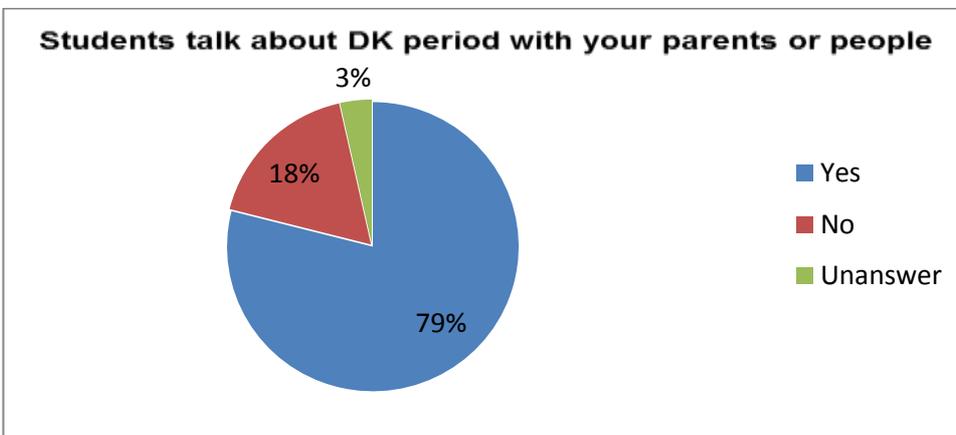
1. *How would you describe your knowledge of DK history?*



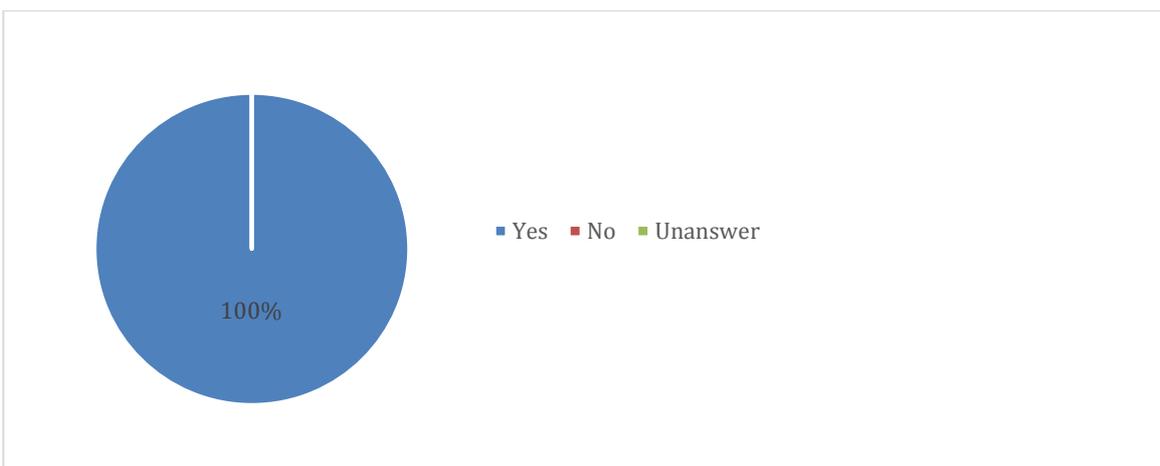
2. Do you believe that mass atrocities occurred during the DK regime?



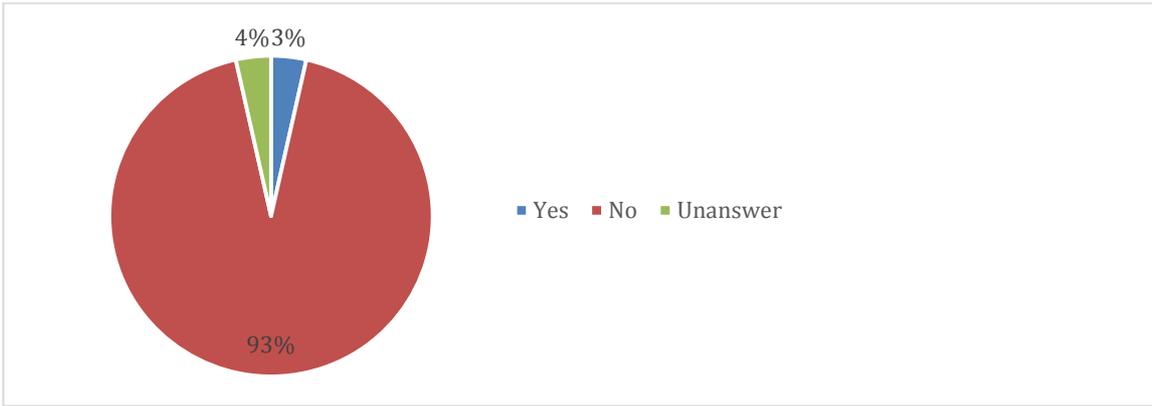
3. Have you ever talk about the DK period with your parents or people who lived during this time? What was the talk about?



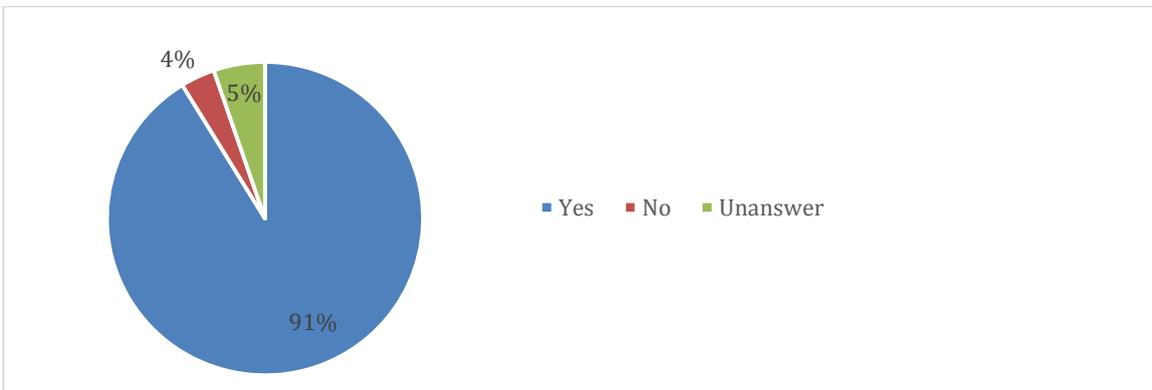
4. Do you think the study of a history of DK is important?



5. *If one of your friends is a son/daughter of a perpetrator, would you discriminate against him or her?*



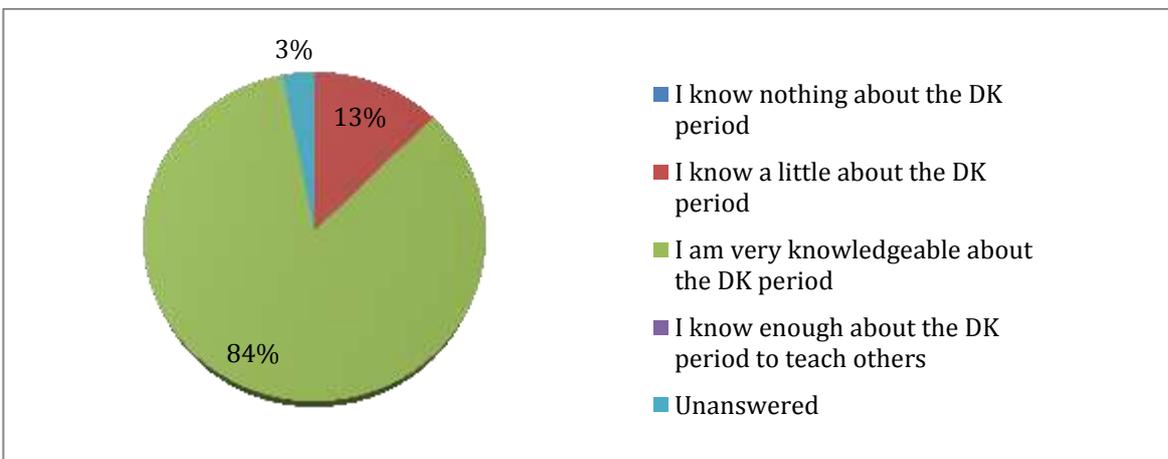
6. *Could the history of DK be taught in schools across Cambodia and ASEAN?*



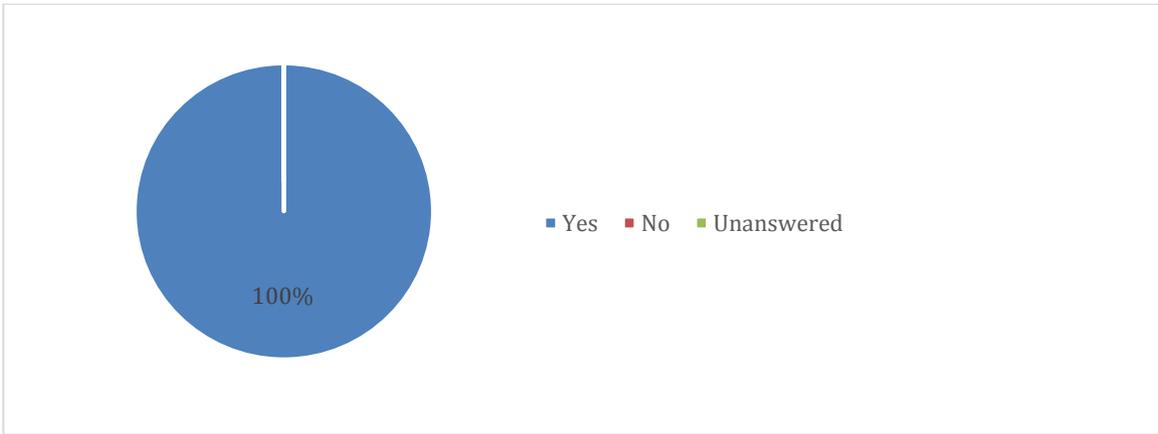
## II. Post-Forum Survey

Twelve questions were asked in this survey, of which four were the same as the pre-forum survey. These questions were:

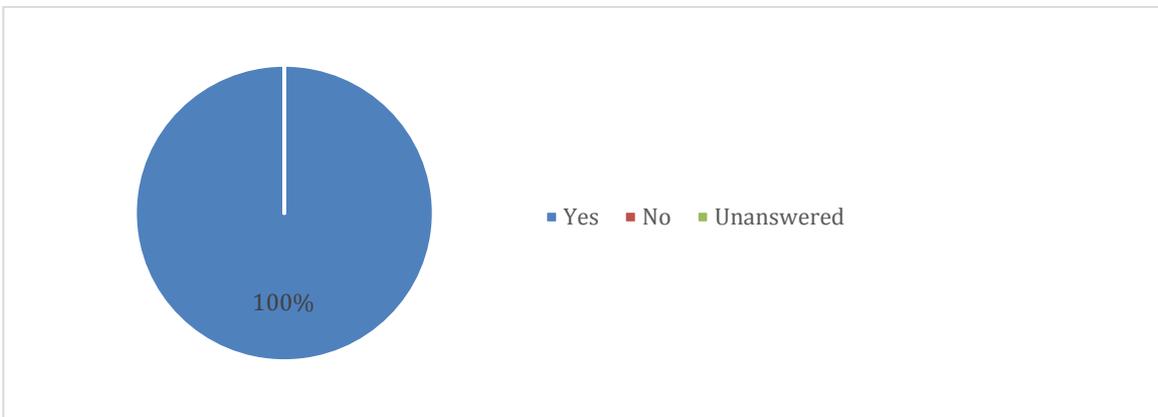
1. *How would you describe you knowledge of DK history?*



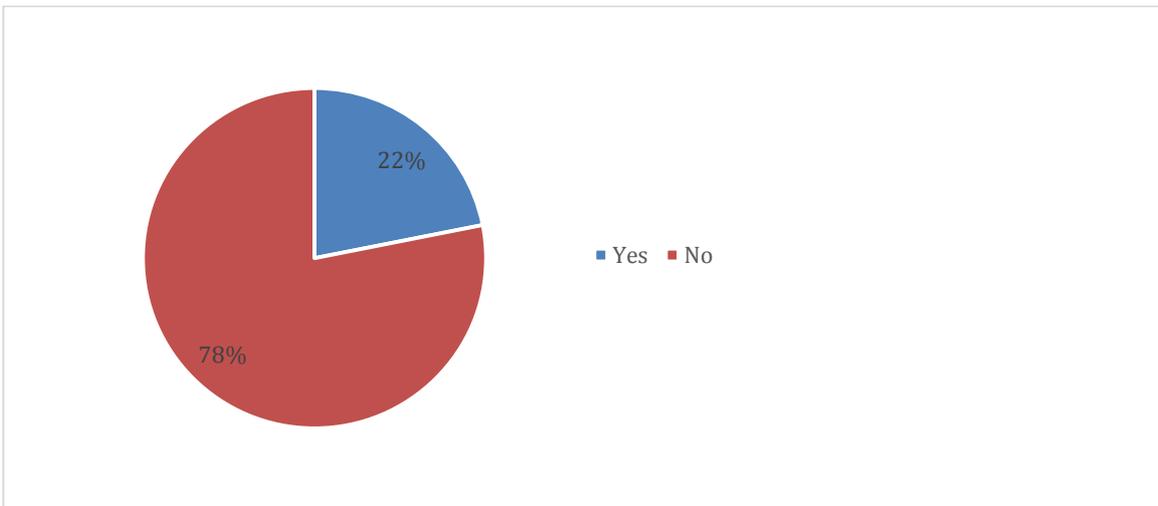
2. *Do you believe that mass atrocities occurred during the DK regime?*



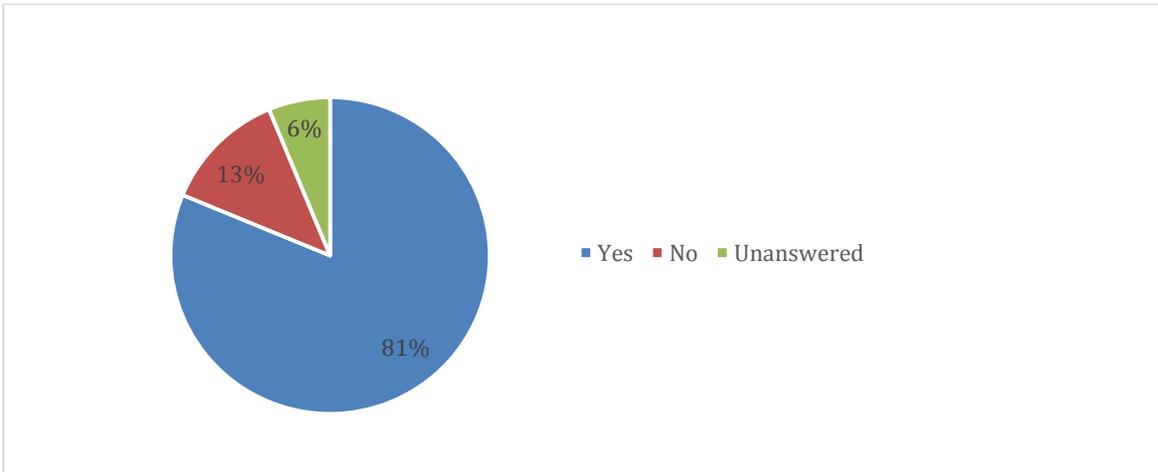
3. *Do you think the study of a history of DK is important?*



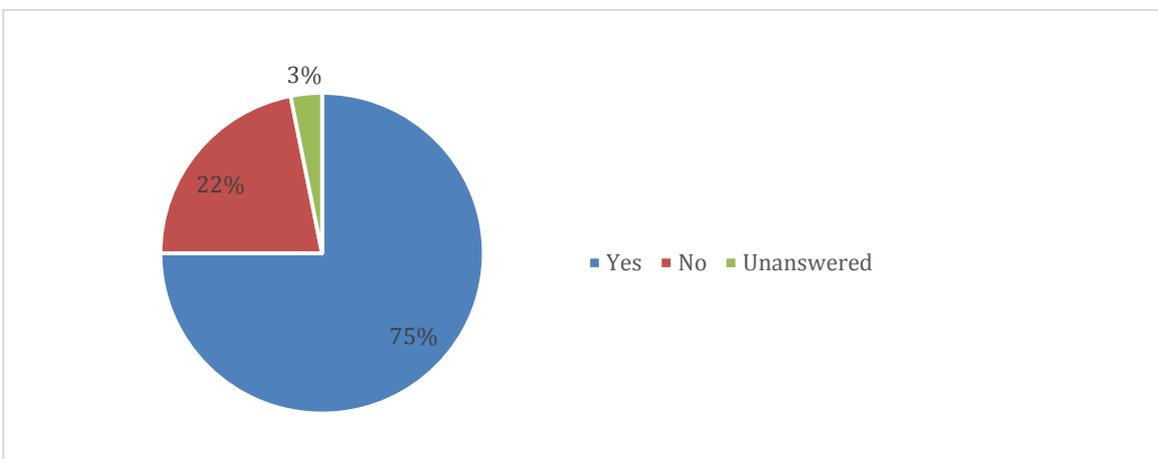
4. *If one of your friends is a son/daughter of a perpetrator, would you discriminate against him or her?*



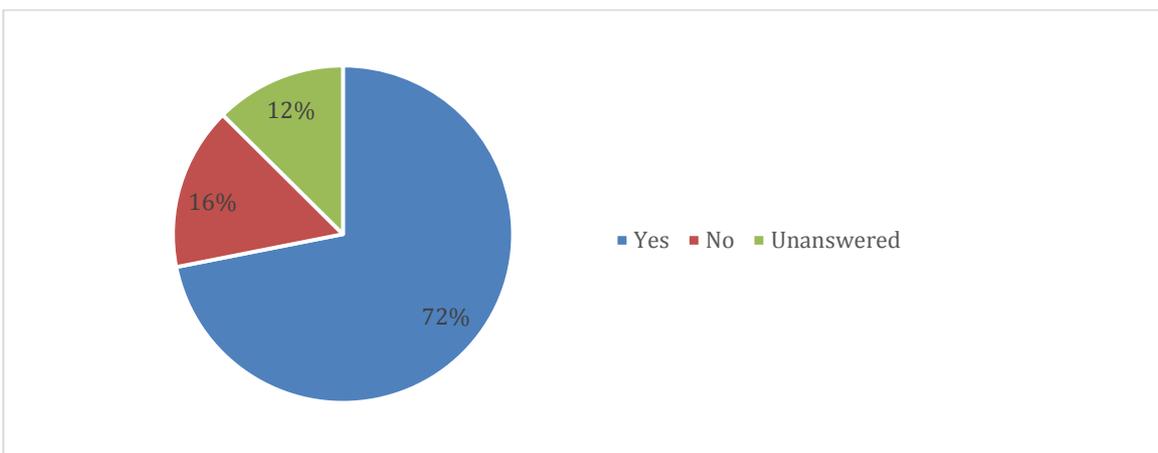
5. *Does the study of DK history encourage you to think of building peace in Cambodian society?*



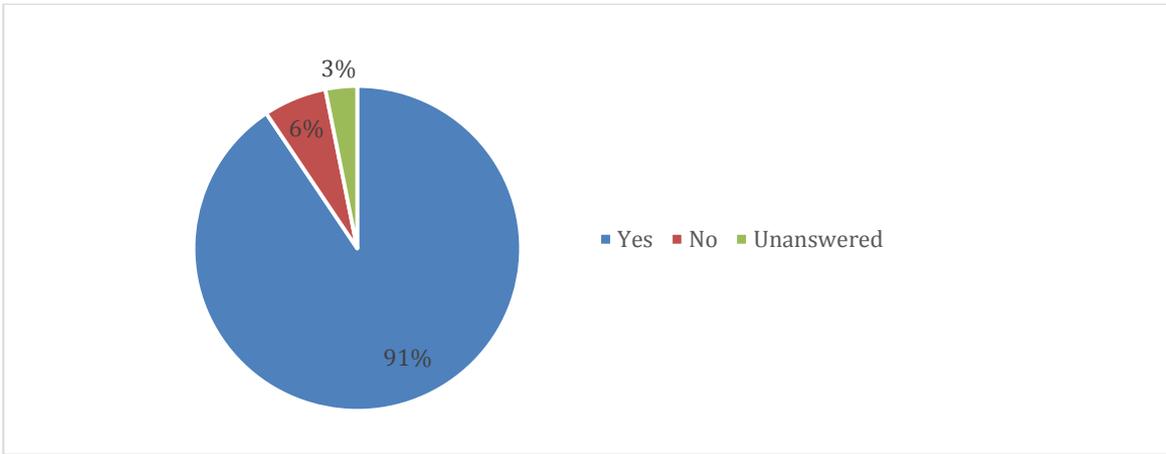
6. *Does the study of DK history encourage you to think of healing?*



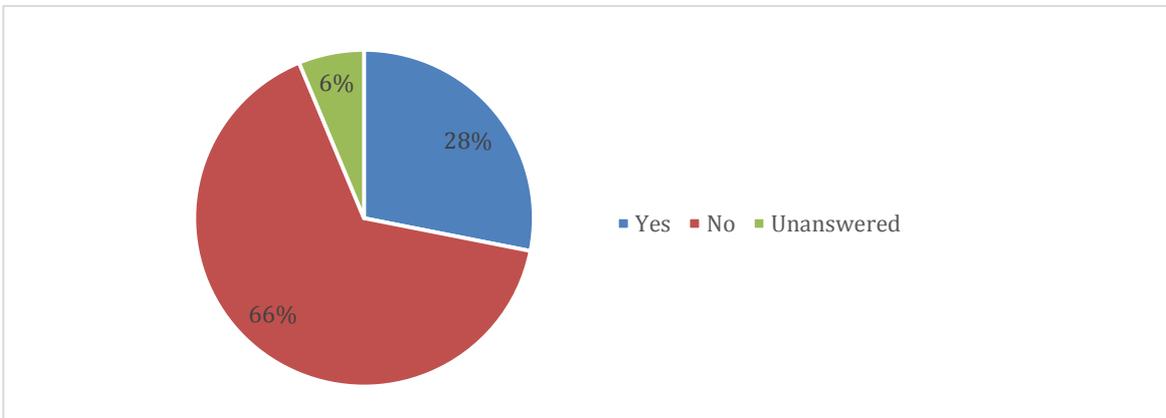
7. *Does the study of DK history encourage you to think of reconciliation?*



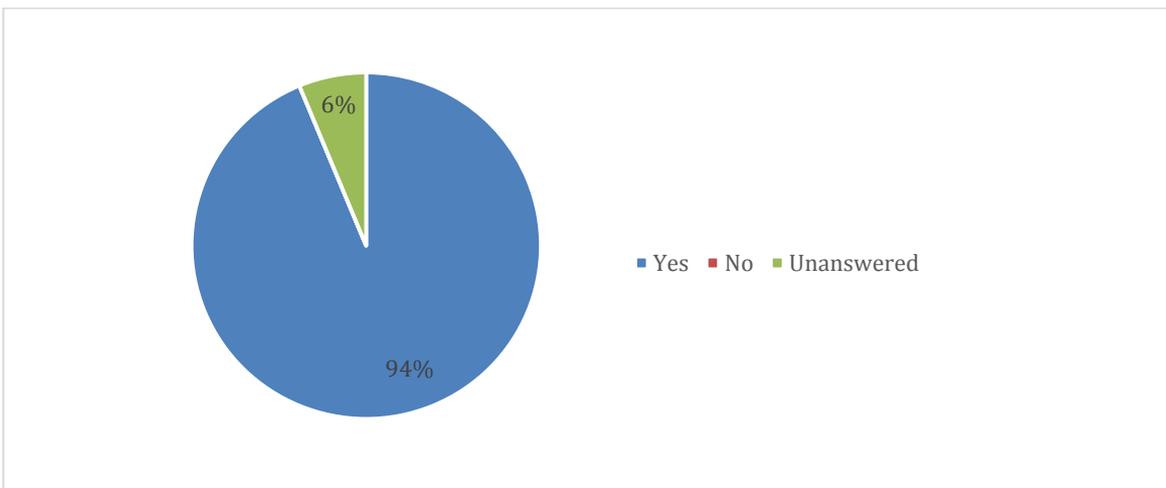
8. *Does the study of DK history encourage you to think of prevention of genocide in the future?*



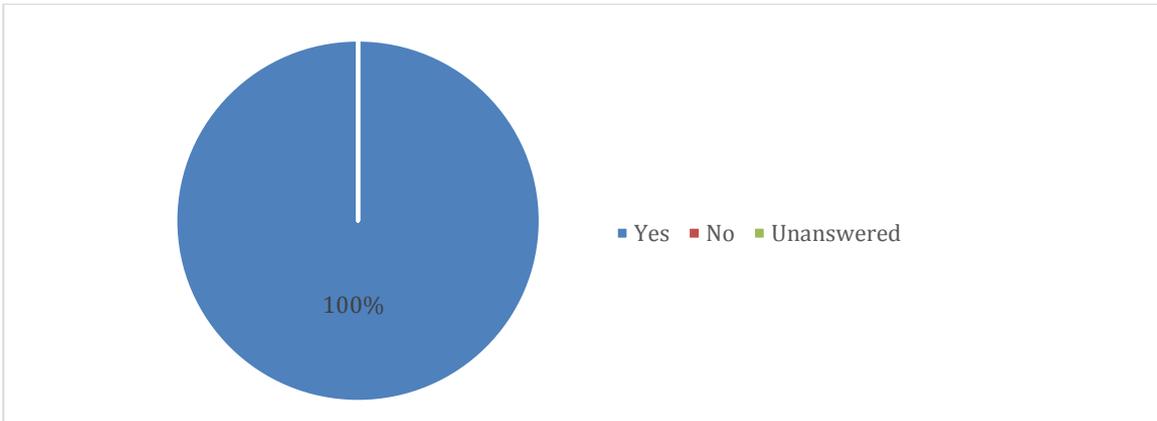
9. *Do you feel uncomfortable learning about DK history?*



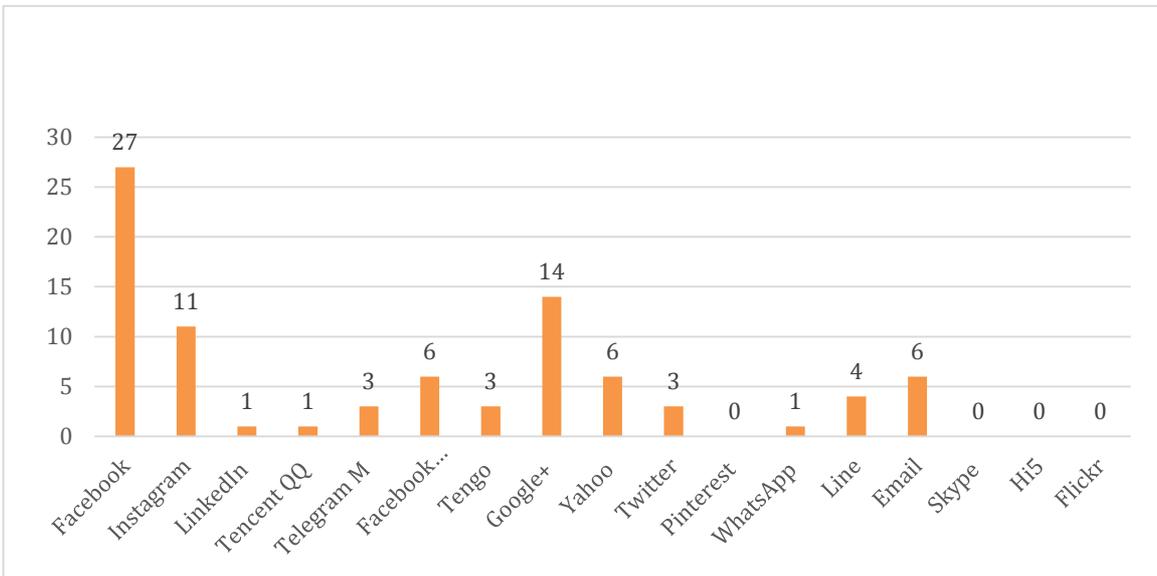
10. *Is it important to remember the history of Democratic Kampuchea?*



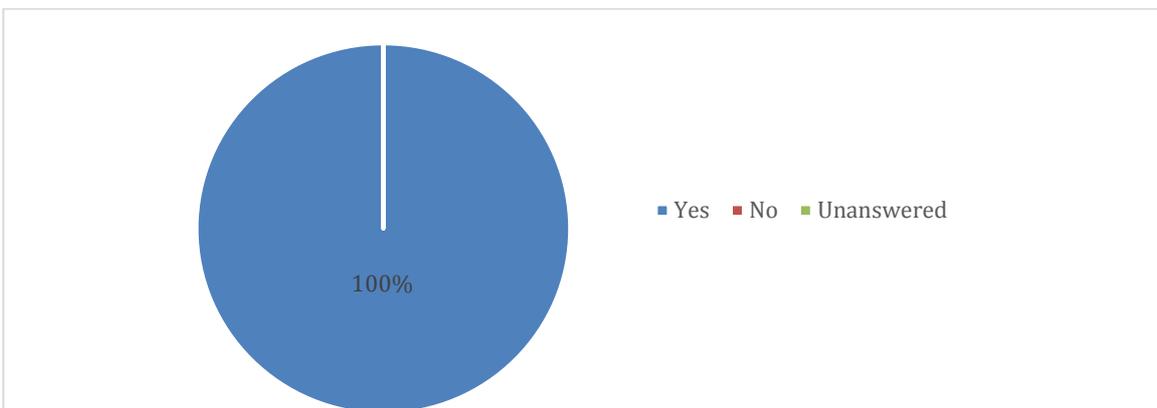
11. *Besides studying Khmer Rouge history inside a classroom or in a public space, do you think this history should be posted on social networks for additional learning and learning materials?*



*If yes, which social networks are best for you?*



12. *Do you like the classroom forum you attended?*



## Discussion of Results

It is clear from comparing the results of the pre- and post- surveys that students gained a greater understanding of Democratic Kampuchea history from the forum that Mr. Rasy conducted. Notable comparisons between the beginning and the end of the forum include:

- Whilst only 2% of students said they were very knowledgeable about DK history before the forum, the post-forum survey showed this number to rise to an incredible 84%.
- 100% of students left the forum believing the mass atrocities occurred, as opposed to only 95% at the start of the forum.
- Perhaps surprisingly, the percentage of students who would discriminate against children of former Khmer Rouge cadre increased from 3% in the pre-survey to 22% in the post-survey.

Other noteworthy results include:

- Only 79% of students talked to their families about life under the Khmer Rouge. This is lower than previous forums and was unexpected given how knowledgeable many of the students already were before the learning segment of the forum began.
- Only 81% of students believed learning DK history promoted peace-building. Likewise the proportion of 72% who thought of reconciliation as well as the 91% who thought of genocide prevention were abnormally low figures as compared to past sessions.
- 22% of students did not believe the forum encouraged them to think of healing. This is also a larger figure than previous forums.
- Facebook was by far the most popular mode of communication for students, with 27 students listing it as their top choice.

## Conclusions

From the survey data provided and the pre- and post- forum comparisons, it is evident that the students found the forum beneficial to their understanding of Democratic Kampuchea history. Indeed, the forum garnered 100% approval from the students. This is particularly important given how strong the students' background knowledge already was – 95% of students in the pre-survey said they had prior knowledge of the DK period and this was demonstrated in the caliber of questions asked. Despite this, the post-forum survey shows that 84% of students saw their knowledge increase. This is evidence that the learning segment (L-Chart) of the forum was successful.

The data also uncovered the tendency for the class content to heighten students' antagonism towards children of former Khmer Rouge cadres. This may be understandable given the forum's focus on the atrocities committed by the Khmer Rouge, however the forum does not aim to increase prejudice in this way. Given that the propensity to discriminate went up so markedly in this forum (from 3% pre-forum to 22% post-forum), this is a cause for concern and should be addressed.

Furthermore, it was apparent that many students were confused by the final questions of the post-forum survey, as is shown by the increasing percentage of unanswered surveys. Across forums, students tended to misunderstand these final questions, which may explain why affirmative responses are lower than expected (on average mid-70%). From students' reactions, it seems unlikely that this is the failure of the forum's content but rather confusion in the meaning of the questions.

Finally, social media was a key theme throughout the forum, with a student even asking Mr. Rasy how he could get in touch via Facebook to ask more questions. The survey results confirm this trend that Facebook is the best way to engage students' with further content and reading on DK history.

## Recommendations

In light of the survey data, classroom observations and the subsequent conclusions, there are a series of alterations to consider for future forums:

- Given that students' often tire out towards the end of the two hour information-packed session, it might be beneficial to offer a short 5 to 10 minute break in the middle of the forum. This break could come in the form of showing a short video or facilitating a more relaxed discussion in another, partially unrelated subject. As the topic being taught is so dense and complex, it can create mental fatigue amongst students. Thus, offering an entertaining video or an opportunity to talk about something else could refresh the students' minds, giving them the rest they need in order to think critically for the remainder of the session.
- Active student participation should be encouraged throughout the session. Currently, student participation is limited to Q&A sessions, with the majority of the forum focused on the learning element. Due to this structure, students are mostly talked *at*, rather than talked *with*. This lack of dialogue throughout the session leads to some students switching off towards the end. To combat this, students could be asked more questions, or group activities could be arranged to enable better communication and teamwork.
- It might be beneficial for the students if time is taken to explain the latter questions in the post-forum survey. Terms such as 'healing', 'reconciliation' and 'peace' are very broad and should be defined in this context. This may reduce the anomalous results and thus provide more reliable data to interpret.
- The increase in the percentage of students who would discriminate against children of former Khmer Rouge cadre after the completion of the forum should be addressed in the learning part of the session. Given the content covered, it is understandable for students to feel an immediate negative reaction to the Khmer Rouge, however the purpose of the forum is not to exacerbate discrimination or prejudice. Thus, this topic ought to be addressed in the content of the forum so as to emphasize the negative impact of such discrimination.
- Social media and other online resources should be more formally integrated in the forum. This may come in the form of asking students to 'like' DC-CAM on Facebook, or 'follow' DC-CAM on Twitter, and proceed to use those platforms as ways to engage with students consistently beyond the forum. This could mean sharing essays, articles

and videos on these platforms, or even posting questions so as to ensure students are still thinking actively about DK history.