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GENOCIDE EDUCATION IN CAMBODIA

TEACHING OF THE HISTORY OF DEMOCRATIC KAMPUCHEA (1975-1979)

REPORT

CLASSROOM FORUM ON

**THE IMPORTANCE OF STUDYING THE HISTOY OF DEMOCRATIC KAMPUCHEA
(1975-1979)**

CHBAR AMPOEU HIGH SCHOOL

03 JUNE 2016

TEAM:

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Figure 1: Rasy starting the forum with presentation

I. Overall Summary

Friday 03 June of 2016 marked the twelfth education forum on teaching the importance of studying the history of “Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)” to high school students in Chbar Ampoeu high school located in the outskirts of the city. The school is a public high school

consisting of a large number of students from different family backgrounds especially during Khmer Rouge regime, which drives the forum to the diversity of experiences and perspectives shared by the participants during the forum. As planned, we expected to see only 80 students from different classes to participate in our forum. However, there was an unexpected miscommunication and rough collaboration from the school director who had not yet announced to the students in advance until the last minute. Things turned away from our expectations. The forum had total number of participants up to almost 200 students, allowing the whole forum a bit out of control due to loud noise.

When the team arrived at the school, at the first sight it seemed that no one got informed about our arrival—nothing had been prepared for us while no one knew about it. To cope with such the unforeseen aberration, the team leader Rasy decided to call the school director, who did not even present at our arrival, with a purpose of urging him for impromptu intervention; he finally assigned his staff to get things done for us. For that reason, the forum was inevitably and uselessly prolonged for nearly one hour from the actual time we hoped to be. It started at 9:45 AM onwards.





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Due to the absence of whiteboard and time constraint, Rasy decided to start the forum without effective K-W-L methodology. He just continued to the slide presentation right after pre-survey session. It was noticed that, like the previous forums, teachers did not really stay in the forum till the end. They tended to leave while the forum was still in progress. To make it even more interesting and promising, Rasy alerted the students by mentioning that the content of Khmer Rouge appeared on the annual state exam; he highlighted important information which would appear in the exam again. Hence, all students paid incredible attention and wrote down information in their notebook. Despite incredible attention paid, time limitation did not allow the forum to run through the line we wanted it to be. Things were made shorter and more intensive so we did not even play the documentary of *Children of Cambodia* while we also did not have enough time for critical Q&A session with too few questions answered. Nonetheless, students were still eager to ask multiple questions and some others, at the end of the event, asked for our website to search for further information about the Khmer Rouge. All in all, the forum would have been even more comprehensive if there had not been errors in pre-arrangement and miscommunication with the school. It should have been earlier and longer for critical discussion and talks. It would be a lesson learnt from Chbar Ampoeu forum which allows us to flexibly respond to unexpected distraction.

II. Introduction to the Forum and Objectives

With a focus on historical narratives as content and critical thinking, debate and reflection as process, the forums are crucial to building sustainability of genocide education in the capital. They will build on the schools' pre-existing education programs that were established using SRI/DC-Cam's curriculum, and they will provide additional opportunities for student learning as well as teacher mentoring. The following are main objective of the forum:

1. To provide students with an opportunity to share and express their personal knowledge on what happened during the DK regime.





2. To let students think critically on the transitional consequences of this legacy of the current Cambodian society.
3. To encourage discussion over this legacy in families and communities.
4. To distribute Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979) textbooks to participating students.

The class forum at Chbar Ampoeu high school was led by Mr. Pheng Pong-Rasy with assistance from his program coordinators including Ms. Min Sanas and Mr. Veng Seanghai in addition with an international intern from America, Mr. Anamay Viswanathan, based on the following agenda:

Activities	Times
Delivering pre-forum surveys to students	9:00 – 9:20
Evaluating students’ pre-existing knowledge through KWL chart	9:20 – 9:35
Displaying “Children of Cambodia”	9:35 – 9:45
Presentation on the importance of studying the history of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)	9:45 – 10:10
5 Q & A session	10:10 – 10:25
Delivering post-forum surveys to students	10:25 – 10:50
Delivering the textbooks “The History of Democratic Kampuchea(1975-1979)	10:50 –11:00

(*Notice:* These planned activities are subjective to change due to unexpected reality at the site.)

III. Forum in Practice

1. Participants and Stakeholders

The overall participation involved 180 students, teachers and school director, who showed off for a short period of time then left, and DC-Cam Genocide Education team including an international intern Anamay Viswanathan who observed the operation. Unlike the first forum in Boeng Keng Kang high school where the deputy director was willing to give an opening speech and stayed till the rest of the forum, then in Chbar Ampoeu forum the school director did not say anything; he



just showed off for a minute and left while other teaching staff did not stay till the rest of the forum. From the beginning to the end, there were only DC-Cam team and students.



Figure 2: A history teacher sitting the forum



Figure 3: Seanghai explaining questions in the survey

According to what we planned, the maximum number of students we hoped to see would not exceed 80 to 100 due to the fact that we were afraid to have things uncontrolled when too many students joined the forum. However, the real number of Chbar Ampoeu forum doubled up to 180 participated students, filling the huge meeting hall with congestion and noise which forced Rasy to repeat “Clap once if you can hear me”, “Clap twice if you can hear me” and “Clap three if can hear me” for several times to cool down the chaotic situation. What we were trying to do was to provide effectiveness and proper comprehension to limited number of student corresponding to the scope and capability of our work. It does not mean we do not welcome many more students; it would be perfect to have them more and all, but it is all about how much we could do for it. Instead, it would turn to inefficiency or chaos if things were excessively intensified. It would have been better if the number of participants had met our expectation of 80 so that we could have a better control with less time uselessly consumed on getting things ready.



2. Opening Stage (Pre-Surveys and K-W-L Method)

To avoid further delay Rasy only gave a very short opening speech of introduction and then let the students complete the pre-forum surveys for about 15 minutes. With such the surveys, it was considered necessary to elicit students' existing knowledge related to Khmer Rouge and experiences told by their family. In addition to stimulation of existing knowledge, the findings from the pre-forum survey also allow us to find out how much they have learnt by comparing to that from the post-forum survey. Total 157 surveys were handed to students, 84 of whom were female and 73 male (*More details of the survey will be included in VI*).

It was unfortunate that we could not manage to conduct K-chart methodology which was considered effective and interesting in the way that it could directly elicit what the student actually KNOW. However, we provided opportunity for students to express what they WANT to know later after presentation of a DK history.

3. Presentation and Q & A (L-W Method)

Mr. Pheng Pong-Rasy did a good job in dealing with time management as he decided to skip K-W-L session and jumped over to slide presentation which gave basic information about how Khmer Rouge originated, came to power, and declined. Same information was used in the previous forums. Regarding the content of the presentation, it can be noticed that the content itself was basically more like narrative approach which only gave chronological events of Khmer Rouge regime as well as how they originated, came to power and declined. That was all what the presentation covered, and then the whole forum slid toward Q & A session.

When allowed to ask questions, the students had no hesitation to raise up their hand and stood up asking a several questions to Mr. Rasy. It was very desirable that a student tended to ask more than one question at a time, depicting a picture that their attention had been paid to the presentation. As long as they were interested in the forum, they became curious to ask questions and learnt from them. It was somehow unsatisfying that Rasy could only receive too few



questions during the session. Against his will, he had to force himself to stop the session as it already reached the end. Students were given the post-forum surveys at the meantime to save time. The followings are three questions asked that time:

1. Before 17 April 1975 who supported the Khmer Rouge to fight against Republic Khmer?
2. Did the Khmer Rouge have extension ambition?

How was it possible for China and Vietnam to support Khmer Rouge while they were the KR enemies?

4. Documentary Play

An AnlongVeng documentary film was screening at the end of the forum while the team were distributing a DK textbook to participants. The reason of screening this film was that we wanted to encourage students to think critically of what happened in the past and let them think of what they would do in present and future for Cambodia after civil war and Khmer Rouge regime.

5. Textbook Distribution

At the nearly end the team started to delivered the textbooks “*History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)*” to all students at the same time they were doing their post-forum surveys. It was lucky that we had prepared the exceeding number of books, enabling all students to have books. However, as supplement to the given textbook, *Searching for the Truth* magazines were also given away but did not fulfill all needs. Students asked for more magazines; thus, we gave them the magazine website as further reading materials because they were also smart phone users who were able to access information online. Given the fact we wanted students who missed the forum to be aware as such, we donated extra textbooks to the school library with a purpose that students in general can learn more about the Khmer Rouge through the books given.



IV. Surveys and Statistics

Pre-Forum Survey

The total respondents for both surveys were 157 consisting of 84 females and 73 males(See figure 4).

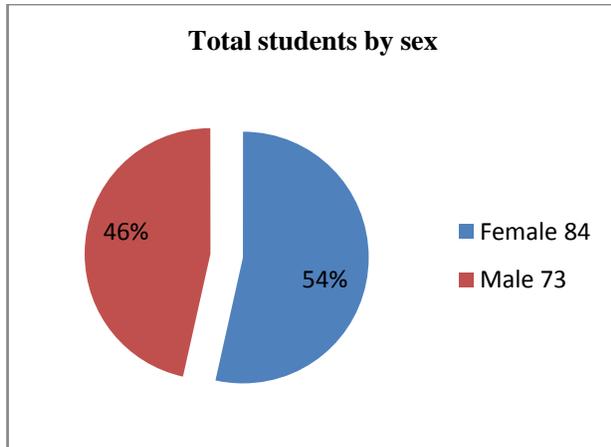


Figure 4: Total Number of Students Divided by Sex

The pre-forum survey which was done at the beginning of the forum was aimed at eliciting students' existing knowledge and perspectives related to Khmer Rouge legacy and reconciliation. The question form was designed into 6 questions with multiple answers chosen upon their will (See figure 5-10).



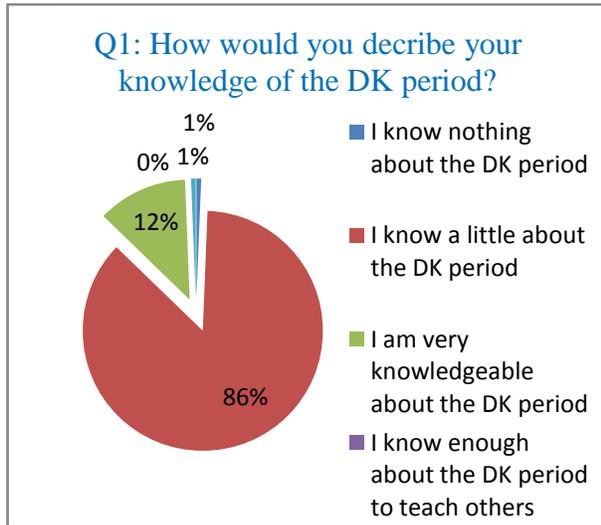


Figure 5: Existing knowledge about DK period

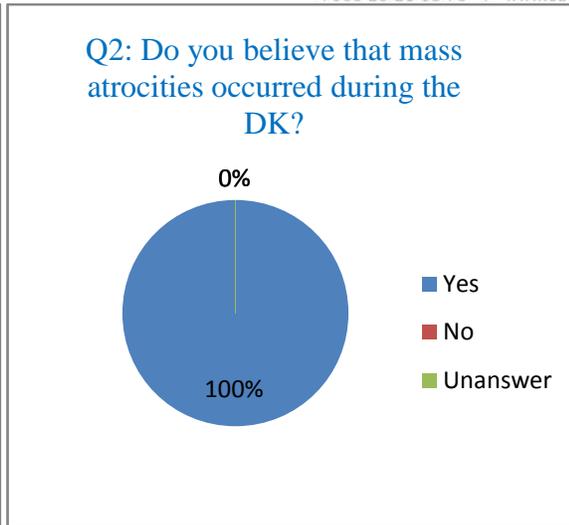


Figure 6: Belief in the existence of the atrocities?

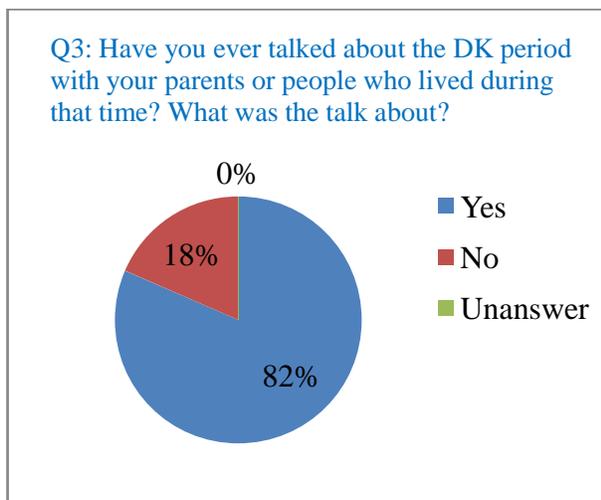


Figure 7: Oral History by Parents and Community

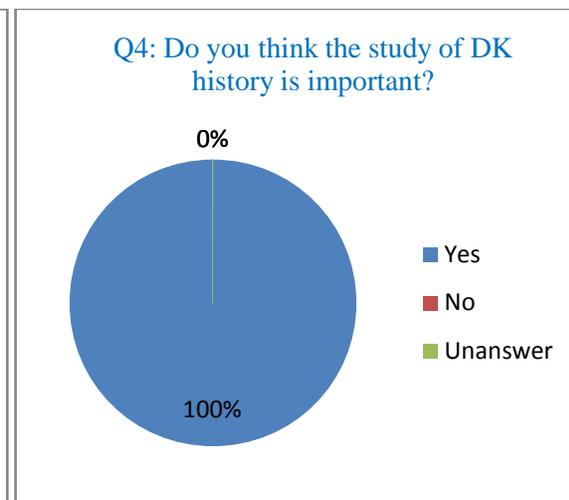


Figure 8: Perspective on the Importance of DK Education



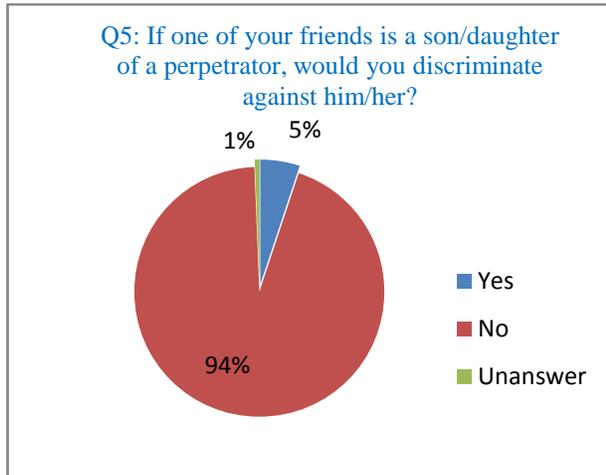


Figure 9: Perspective on Discrimination against KR

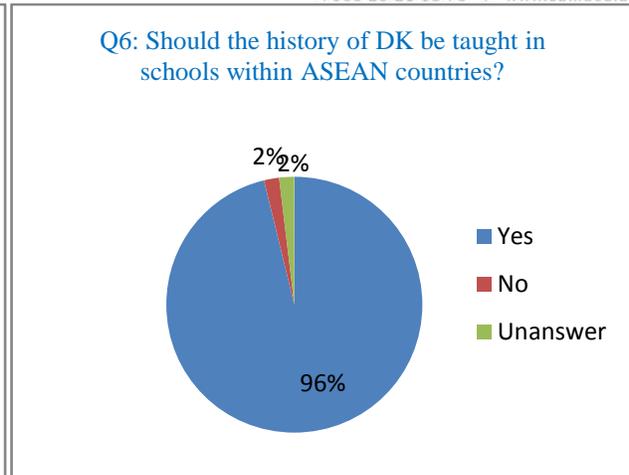


Figure 10: DK history curriculum in Asia

Post-Forum Survey

The following are the findings by the post-forum survey designed to stimulate the new insights which the students have acquired by the end of the forum(See figure 11-23).

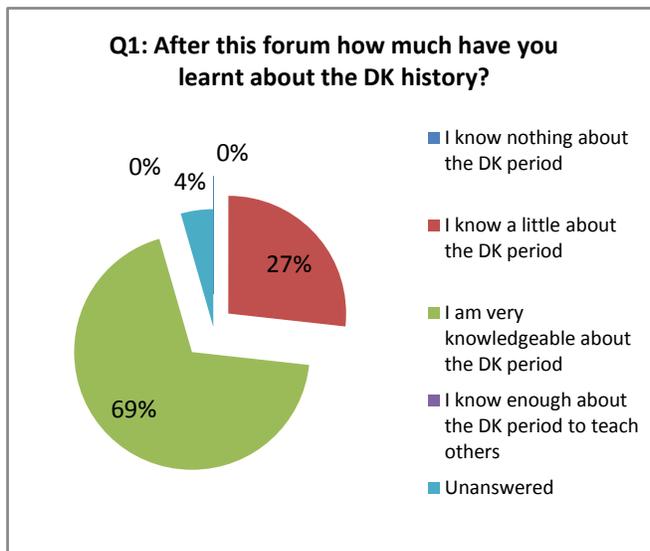


Figure 11: Student’s new insights after the forum

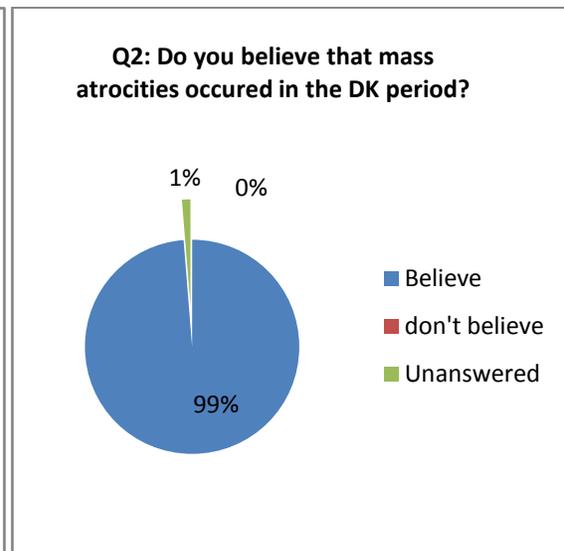


Figure 12: Students’ belief in the existence of KR



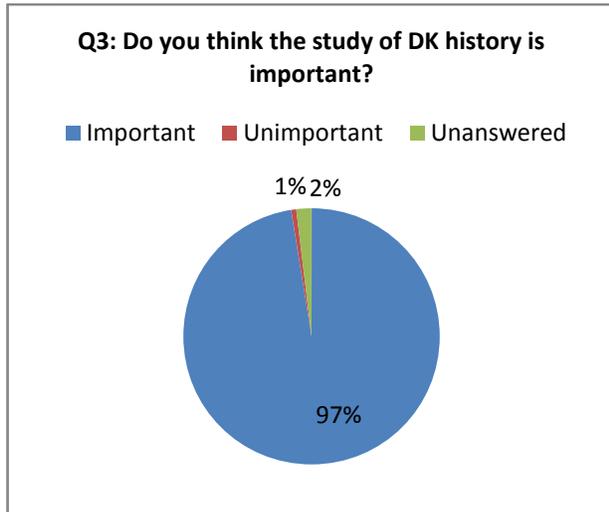


Figure 13: Perspective on the importance of DK study.

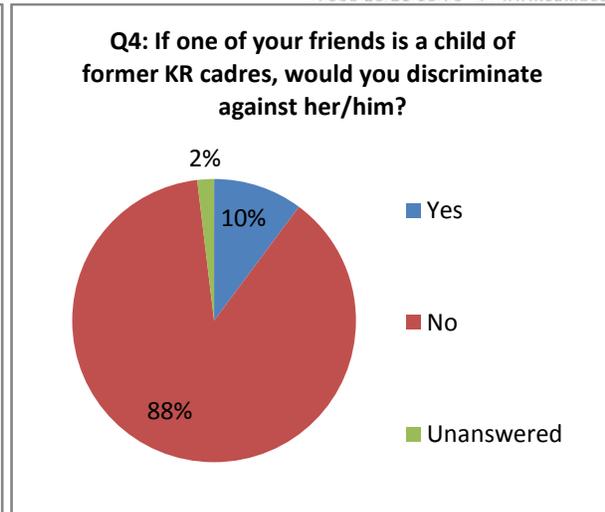


Figure 14: Perspective on KR children discrimination

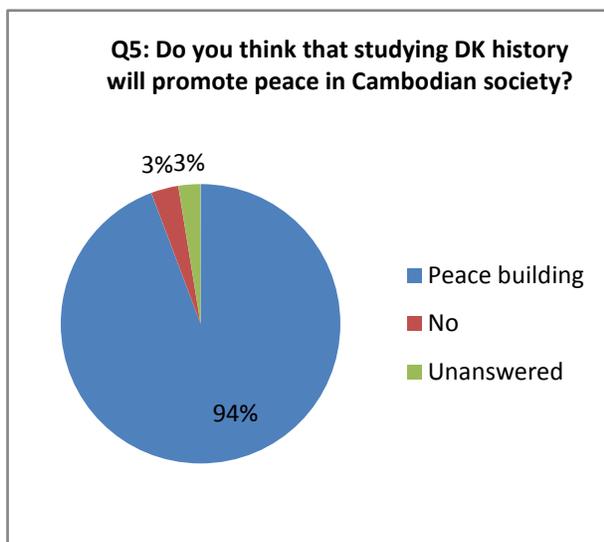


Figure 15: Perspective on peace building in Cambodia

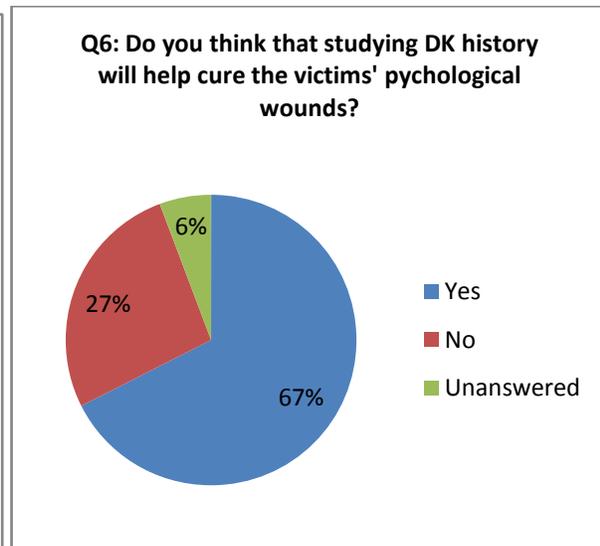


Figure 16: Perspective on victims' psychological recovery



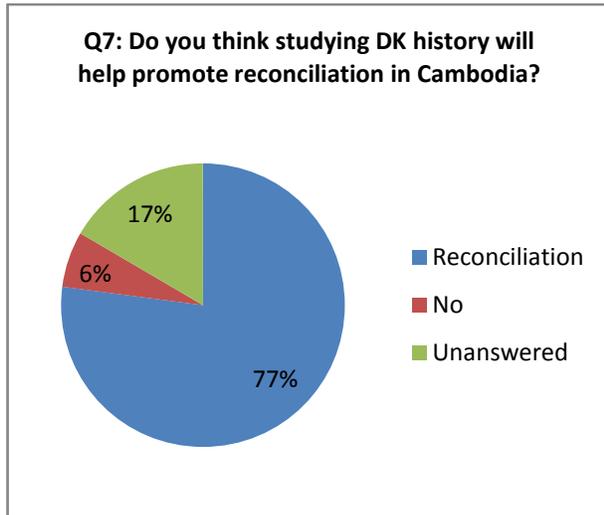


Figure 17:DK history and Reconciliation in Cambodia

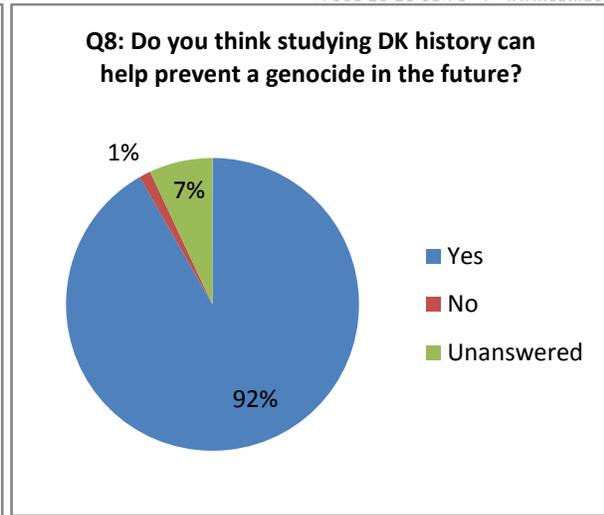


Figure 18: DK history and genocide prevention

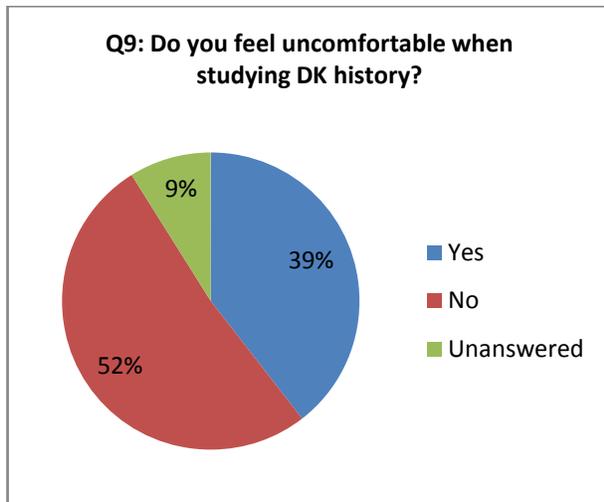


Figure 19: Personal feeling when studying DK history

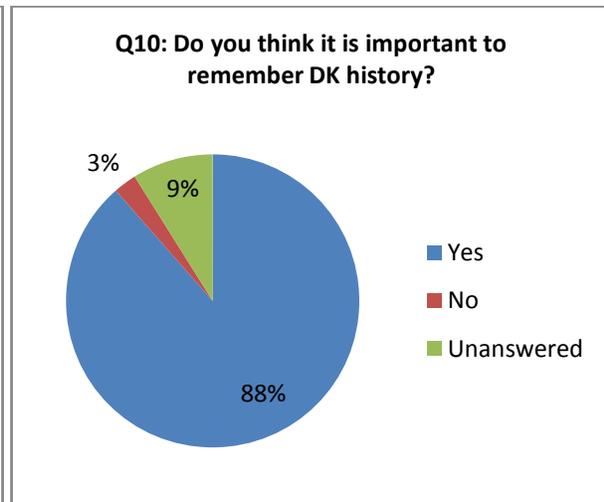


Figure 20: Importance of remembering DK history



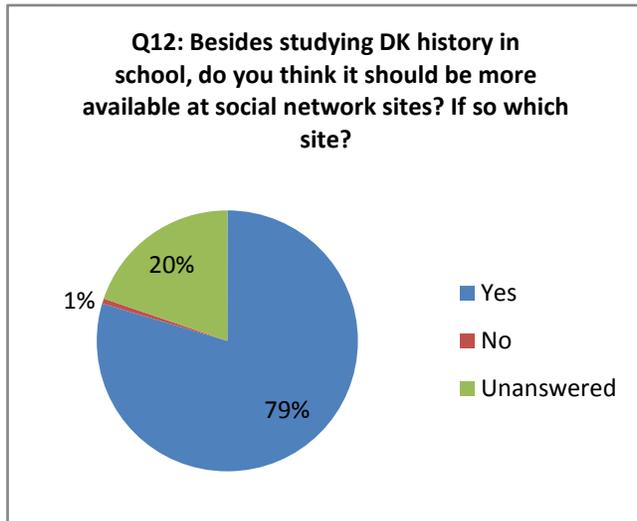


Figure 21: DK history and Social Network

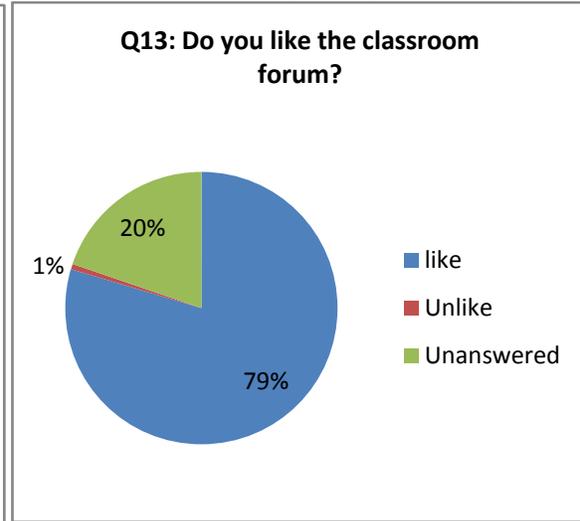


Figure 22: Students' interest in the forum

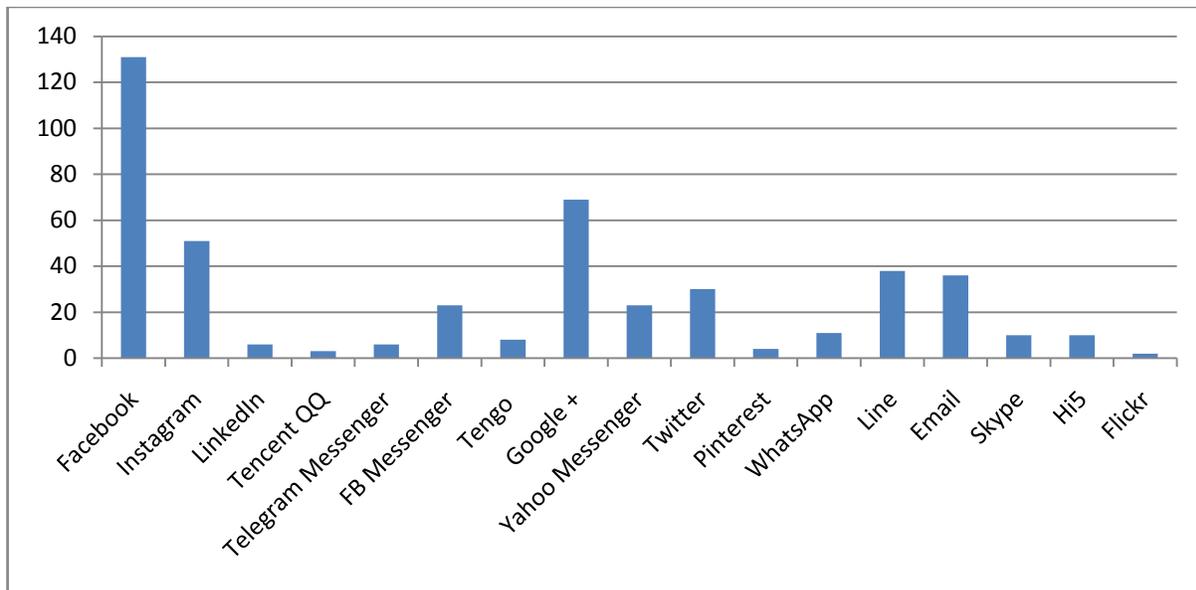


Figure 23: Elective social network sites by students

V. Result and Interpretation

Based on these results, we found that the understating of students is rising; however, there is a problem of time allowed, leaving many unanswered questions. Compared to the pre-forum



survey result, 86 per cent of students respond that they know a little about the DK history, but the number drops to 27 per cent for the post-forum survey while 69 per cent of them get very knowledgeable about DK history. If we look a little bit closer, it would be a problem with reliability of the level of being knowledgeable—to what extent do those students define themselves knowledgeable? This question is a bit abstract to measure, but it is reliable enough in a way it triggers general understanding and knowledge about DK history.

By the way, a very interesting finding lies on a question about discrimination against former KR cadres' children. Before the forum happened, only 05 per cent of students chose to hold discrimination against KR cadres' children despite being friends. Amazingly, the result from post-forum survey shows the increased rate up to 10 per cent of students who possibly discriminate the innocent children of KR officials. It would be hard to determine whether they are really more angry and discriminating because limit shortage would have allowed them to tick on the answer unconsciously.

VI. Success Stories

Backup for Vulnerable Oral History: Time may lock memories inside the door of disappearance in the way that old people, former victims of Khmer Rouge, are not willing to share their experience even to their own children or younger relatives. The reason behind this hesitation is the severe trauma psychologically and physically caused by any forms of torture and inhumane



Figure 24: Textbook Distribution to all Students. Pheng Pong Rasy in the middle forth from the right.

acts during the regime. Parents chose not to tell their story to the children for the fact that they would feel getting more traumatized and stressed rather than reconciled.

Whilst textbooks were being delivered to individual students at

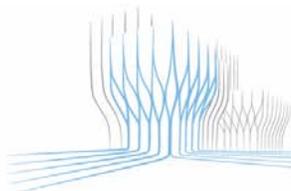
the end of the forum, one of them raised her face up and told the Genocide Education team that she would hide the DK textbook from her mother who always feels sad and cry when recalling about Khmer Rouge atrocities. The same girl added that she also would not dare to dig things out of her mother's memories of pain; she chooses not to bother her. Instead she would love to read the textbook and learn from the school in addition to other forms of non-formal education like the forum. On account of this case, the classroom forum especially textbook distribution plays an impressive role in sustaining the genocidal legacy from a generation to another by providing books and discussion session as immortal evidence to the young.

Talking in relation to stress management, a psychologist gives a very good analogy of holding a glass of water in comparison to that people hold their stress or trauma. The psychologist told the audience that how heavy the glass is does not matter but how long you are holding it does. It would not feel heavy at all if we hold it for only a second, yet if we are trying to hold it for hours or days, even an empty glass would make your arm numb and paralyzed. This experiment may suggest traumatized patients to recover themselves by sharing and letting go all bad memories as soon as possible. Otherwise, they will get more serious holding the stress longer. Back to the matter of Khmer Rouge victims, some of them deal with stress and trauma differently. They would feel painful or even more after telling their stories of misery. All mentioned earlier would be a reason why parents choose to have all their Khmer Rouge experiences unheard by their children

Ethnically Diverse Coverage: The forum sees a great satisfactory result due to the inclusiveness of more diverse of minority groups including Cham Muslim and Vietnamese ethnic students (See *Figure 25*). Based on the



Figure 25: A Cham Muslim school girl receiving a textbook from the Genocide Education Team. Mr. Anamay the first and Seanghai the second from the left.





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distinguishable names seen on the list, we can estimate that 07 Cham Muslim student joined the forum, while we found it hard to identify Vietnamese students. However, Min Sanas, one of Genocide Education team, noticed male students pointing at each other when Rasy was talking about the killings of Vietnamese. This would tell us that those students were probably ethnically Vietnamese. Also in the locality of Chbar Ampoeu there are many Vietnamese ethnics living around the school, so it is more likely to hold them in the forum. The forum is very impactful in a way that young generations of ethnic diversity are able to learn it for the sake of peace building and reconciliation and tolerance. Knowing their past would shape their future of prosperity and stability forward social progress and prosperity.

An unforgettable history of Vietnamese and Cham Muslim slaughter reveals the fact that Cambodia experienced what we can address as “*ethnic cleansing*” which commonly happened in such other genocides as the Holocaust, Armenia, Bosnia, Myanmar’s Rohingya or Rwanda and so on. Defenseless minorities were made a scapegoat and dehumanized for unconditional killings. The truth is that Cambodia does not only consist of native Khmers but also different races and minority groups. Definitely during this 21st century there is no way to find a country with only one singular purified race as wanted by Pol Pot or Adolf Hitler. The more they try to purify, the more dreadful consequences they pose.

VII. Conclusions

Once and for all, the classroom forum in Chbar Ampoeu underwent certain challenges chiefly the miscommunication and rough collaboration from the school. Fortunately, the Genocide Education team managed to cope up with the situation by simultaneously gathering students with assistance from the school deputy director and teachers. However, it still consumed an immense amount of time on getting things done. Ideally we always hope to have nicer collaboration from the school especially the school director who is in charge of decision making.





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Despite having too many students over our expectation, we still continued the forum with no troubles but instead giving them new insights which they never heard before. Though we could not play the film screening for some reasons, they still enjoyed sitting the forum till the end and asked many more questions at the end. The Q & A session was somehow ruined by time constraint which prevented us from having a critical discussion and asking questions. It seemed like more students had more questions for us. Another thing we should have done was the K-W-L learning methodology which the team failed to implement due to time shortage. We had been doing the K-W-L chart for all forums, but that time we did not. Eventually it is said multiple times that miscommunication and rough collaboration ruined many things we had planned to do.

In relation to this, we can see on the survey findings that students really want to keep contact with the Genocide Education team through social media. Facebook would be the most popular social media suggested by students in order to keep DK history heard and seen online nationally and internationally.

VIII. Recommendations

Due to the attentive observations, the following are proposed suggestions to be considered for improving the forum in general.

- ***Further suggested readings:*** It should include small notes of DC-Cam's websites such as *Searching for the Trust* magazine and so on, and most students already use smart phones. It is not enough for students just to sit in our intensive classroom forum because the history of DK is very broad in the way that it is related to different events and complex contexts. Students look even more curious to ask further questions. Needless to say, several students asked for websites so that they could access for further readings online.





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- **More critical discussion:** Giving just presentation on history of Khmer Rouge is not enough but somehow may be boring to some students who already knew it. What we should do is to keep students awake by providing critical discussion beyond such the narrative content. The forum's objective is allow students to think critically on transitional consequences of DK legacy, so it would be better if the team can insert extra content on why genocide is not a good thing with reflection to current political situation. Teach them to be critical citizens.
- **Strict limitation on participant number:** To avoid repeated chaos, we should talk to the school on the strict limitation on participants because the result may turn to be disaster if too many students come in. In addition to quantity what we basically need is genuine quality to impart information and competence into students' mentality so that they would also deliver what they learn to the others automatically and willingly. This would look like domino effects toward group dynamic of information transfer.
- **Hooking up at first sight:** To give a very good impression, at the beginning of the forum we should do an activity which seems more interesting to hook students with us. It is suggested to have one or two students to come in the front for sharing what they knew and heard about Khmer Rouge and what their parents told them about it.

