



SLEUK RITH INSTITUTE

A Permanent Documentation Center of Cambodia
55 Sihanouk Blvd. P.O. BOX 1110, Phnom Penh, Cambodia
+855 23 21 18 75 | www.cambodiasri.org

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)***

RUSSEY KEO HIGH SCHOOL

24 JUNE 2016

TEAM:

PHENG PONG-RASY

MIN SANAS

ANAMAY VISWANATHAN

VENG SEANGHAI





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I. Abstract

The Sleuk Rith Institute, a permanent Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam), in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, plans to achieve 15 classroom forums on the importance of studying the History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979) in 15 high schools in Phnom Penh by July 20 16. It is the 14th classroom forum located in Russey Keo high school. The forum works closely with the local school administration to ensure appropriate participation of students mainly from grade 12. With a focus on historical narratives as content and critical thinking debate and reflection as process, these forums are crucial to building sustainability of genocide education in the capital Phnom Penh. They will build on the school's pre-existing genocide education programs that were established using SRI/DC-Cam's curriculum, and they will provide additional opportunities for students learning as well as teacher mentoring. The purpose of this forum will be to educate students on the importance of the history of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979) as well as provide a forum for encouraging critical thought, dialogue and debate on how the country's past informs its present-day problems and future. The classroom forum has profound implications for Cambodian future of tolerance, peace and reconciliation.

II. Introduction

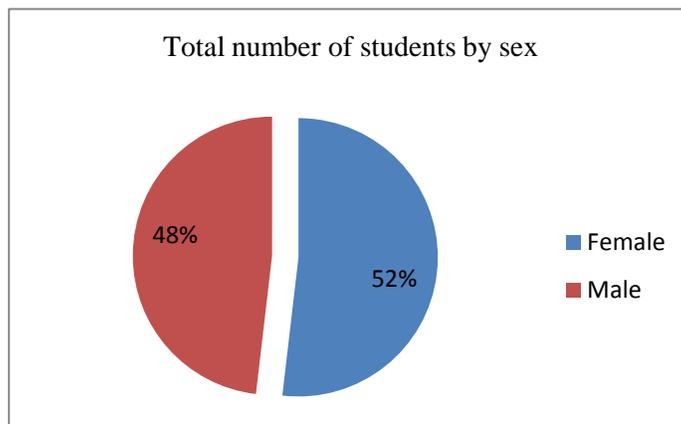
The establishment of the forum is based upon a hope to see better awareness of genocide education within students in the capital. At the same time, vulnerability of oral history telling is considered a challenge when their parents do not feel open to let those students know. Time flies fast. Another concern would happen when parents who lived through the regime pass away in the future, so the young people may lack of chance to hearing the histories from the living witnesses. Therefore, this scenario would upset the intergenerational sustainability of Khmer Rouge history. To be specific, we are going to examine how the classroom forum helps students in Russey Keo high school to be sustainably aware of the genocide by reflecting the Cambodia's atrocious pasts to see current-day problem and future, what students have acquired from the forum, and what are



the implications for Cambodian future as the whole. We hope to see great information delivery with ethnicity diversity because within Russey Keo neighborhoods there are Khmer Islamic communities living closely with Khmer people.

In regard of methodology used, the forum, in general, focuses on using historical narrations as content, reflection and discussion as means to convey students about the Khmer Rouge legacy and its importance. K-W-L teaching method is in use to get students involved by keeping students in a learning circle formed by their own experiences and questions. Furthermore, to measure their knowledge, we design pre-and-post forum surveys which are given to all participating students so that we can closely examine what and how much the students have learnt afterwards. In terms of narrative approach, we choose slide presentation as a mean to deliver information to students, followed Q & A session. To things even interesting, a documentary film (*Anlong Veng Peace Tour*) is played before it goes to the closing session with textbook distribution.

III. Methodology



Participants: The forum is joined by total 54 students, 28 of them are female and 26 are male. Those students are studying all in grade 12 in the same classroom. The reason behind exclusive selection on grade 12 students is that students may find it easier to comprehend what it

taught due to the existing syllabus about KR in their class.

Different from other forum there are no teachers and school director showing in the forum because they are busy with their own jobs. More than students, there are three team



members from DC-Cam’s Genocide Education Project, including Mr. Pheng Pong-Rasy, Veng Seanghai and Amanay Viswanathan, an international intern from University of North Carolina, US. Mr. Rasy plays a main actor giving presentation and answering questions while Veng Seanghai is responsible for taking notes for report writing, and Anamay takes care of taking photos.

Talking about ethnicity division, there are 4 Muslim students and the rest are Khmer. In terms of survey conduct, we select all 54 students as our samples because it is more valid to hear from different voices which consist of different groups—maybe perpetrator or victim’s side.

Materials: The whole forum does not need many pieces of equipment but only a few necessary things for the overall operation. Those things include slide projector device, speakers, textbooks, magazines, cameras and survey forms. With slide projector show, students are able to learn faster and better by the visual materials. We have to make sure all information is delivered to all learners with all styles: visual, aural, verbal or logical learners. They learn by seeing, reading and hearing from the slide, film and textbooks and magazines. On the matter of forum assessment, what we need is the survey forms which help measure how much students know and learn after the forum.

Activities	Times
Delivering pre-forum surveys to students	9:00 – 9:20
Evaluating students’ pre-existing knowledge through KWL chart	9:20 – 9:35
Presentation on the importance of studying the history of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)	9:35 – 10:00
5 Q & A session	10:00 – 10:15
Displaying “Anlong Veng Peace Tour”	10:15 – 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

Table 1: Program’s Agenda for the Russey Keo classroom forum



Procedure: To specify the chronological sequent events, it is better to distinguish the forum into three different sections including opening section, presentation section and closing section. During the opening section which lasts about 40 minutes in total, there are only three main events to happen—opening speech given by Rasy and pre-forum survey completed by all 54 students and *K-W* chart¹. After all materials are ready to use, Rasy immediately came to the stage and gave an introductory speech about himself and the forum in detail. Without further delay, then came pre-forum survey delivering section when all students are asked to complete the form designed to elicit their existing knowledge on DK history. Students take about 15 minutes to complete the survey form, with assistance from the team explaining any necessary questions. After all survey forms are completed, Rasy, a key presenter, generates K-W-L method. He starts with K-W chart, asking students what they already *know* and what they *want* to know about the history of Democratic Kampuchea. Different from the previous forum, for this time students are more active to share information and experiences related to Khmer Rouge. The following is information in K-W chart.

KNOW	WANT to know
Khmer Rouge evacuated people on 17 April 1975	Reasons for Khmer Rouge establishment
Khmer Rouge eliminated Khmer currency	Who were Pol Pot, Ieng Sary, Khieu Samphan, Ieng Tirth, Nuon Chean?
Khmer Rouge wanted to create classless society	Why did they kill their own Khmer people?
Khmer Rouge established cooperatives so that people ate communally	Why did they kill the intellectuals and their own cadres?
Forced marriage	Why were people evacuated from Phnom Penh?
	Reasons from Khmer Rouge decline.
	People couldn't eat their own rice. Where did the rice go for?

Table 2: K-W chart in which information from students is listed on what they know and want to know.

Presentation time flies in afterward, lasting about 30 minutes in total and followed by Q & A section. Rasy started the presentation by asking students where the word “Khmer Rouge”

¹ K-W chart is a part of K-W-L teaching method in which students are encouraged to give out the existing knowledge about the Khmer Rouge and inquired information—what they *KNOW* and *WANT* to know.



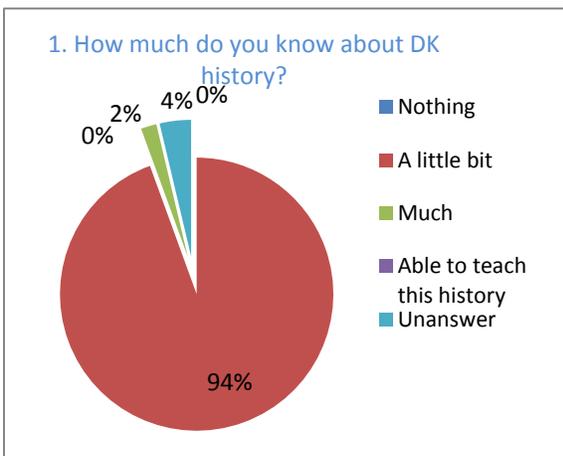
came from and how they came to power. Students paused for a moment before giving the answers. Pointing at images on the progressive slides, Rasy continued his presentation with how KR took control Phnom Penh and 8 policies of Khmer Rouge and other important information about Khmer Rouge like who were Khmer Rouge enemies. Even more interestingly, this presentation was covered up with interesting Q&A session when students have many questions for Rasy to answer.

To end the forum, the team handed out post-forum survey forms to students to prove how much they have learned so far from the forum, compared with the result from the pre-forum survey. The same samples of 54 students are selected for the survey. For the sake of time saving, we have no need to explain each question to students but walk around them to give necessary elaboration. The questions cover important themes such as importance of studying KR history, intergenerational discrimination, peace building and reconciliation initiative, mass atrocities, secondary traumatization, DK history in ASEAN curriculum and raised awareness through social media. Then textbooks and magazines are distributed to all students and school library.

IV. Survey Results

Pre-Forum Survey: The pre-forum survey which was done at the beginning of the forum was aimed at eliciting students' existing knowledge and experiences related to Khmer Rouge legacy and reconciliation. The question form was designed into 6 questions with multiple answers chosen upon their will. With comment boxes below each question, the 6 questions inquire 5 themes mainly about students' existing knowledge of DK, family discussion, importance of studying DK history, intergenerational discrimination, and DK study in ASEAN. The following are data received from the survey:



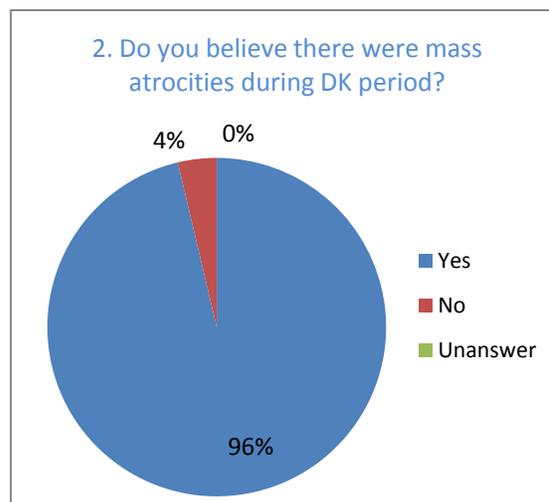


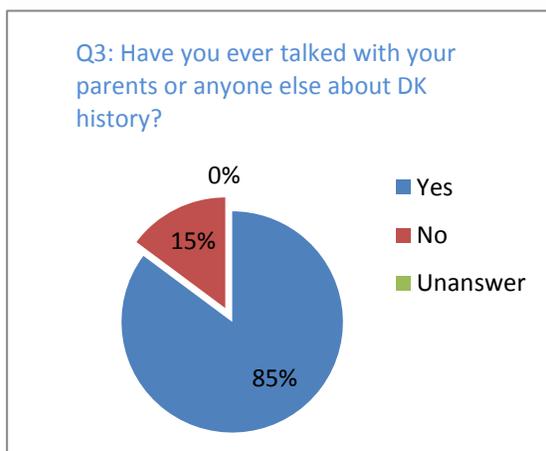
Overall 94 per cent of students prove themselves knowing a little bit about the DK history typically due to parental oral history and in-class study. At the same time, only 2 per cent of them define themselves knowing much about the Khmer Rouge history and another 4 per cent do not answer.

Mostly convinced by oral histories told by parents and grandparents, 96 per cent of students believe in the existence of mass atrocities in DK period.

Amongst those 96 per cent, some students respond that they believe in mass atrocities through images, videos/films and the visit to Tuol Sleng and Choeng Ek in addition to in-class study. In contrary, if looking at another 4 per cent who ticked “No”, we will see something controversial about what the item they choose and what they write in the comment box.

One respondent named Keo Choranoi writes, “It is because Cambodia is prosperous and peaceful.” while another respondent writes nothing, which describes that fact that the students would have been confused by the question or would have taken it for granted.





Those 85 per cent of students have talked about DK history with their parents and most of them like to talk with grandparents. Common topics they often talked about are related to misery, torture, lack of food and shelter, human rights abuse and sexual molestation². However, another 15 per cent did not ever discuss about Khme Rouge with other people.

It is not surprising to see all students realize the importance of studying DK history. The students provide a common thing that DK study helps Cambodian next generation avoid the return of Khmer Rouge as well as promotes continuity of Khmer Rouge intergenerational education³. Interestingly, a student thinks the study of DK history is important for Cambodia’ future by allowing people to reflect who they were and where they came from⁴.

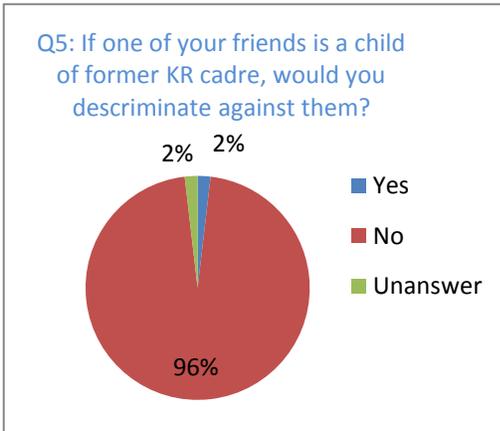


² The information is derived from **Prum Chann Thida**’s survey form. She comments, “[...] my mother told me that she had no proper shelter, was persecuted and sexually molested.”

³ Comment from **Sorm Ratanak-Visal** in the form: He writes, “It [DK history study] gives knowledge to the next Khmer generation who, though, did not encounter the events themselves. [So] We are able to know about it too.”

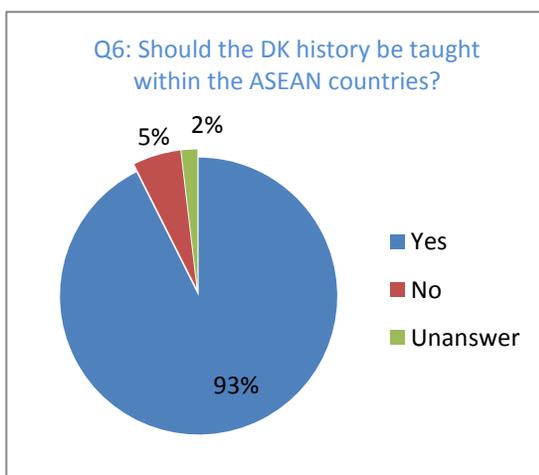
⁴ Comment from **An Tola**: He writes, “It is very important. If we don’t know who we were and where we were from, it is not good for a man [us] to live in the future.”





For this question, at the first sight it seems interesting to see a student responding with negativity over the discrimination against a child of former KR cadre. Maong Channa, 18 years old, responds “yes” to the question, but it sounds a bit inconsistent with her comment which presumes the innocence of the children⁵. In particular, other 96 per cent of students do not hold discrimination, and other 2 per cent leave

no response. Most of them tend not to discriminate the KR cadres’ children, based on the following statements: *“Everyone needs freedom. It does not mean they [children] will follow their parents’ old path. People in the past had ideology which differs from that of people now. We are all Khmer, so we have to find a better solution to this.”* According to these statements quoted from the survey comment, we can assume that students, throughout Khmer Rouge education, are able to better tolerate each other with sensible judgment.



The overall finding shows that 93 per cent of students agree to have DK history taught widely within ASEAN community due to certain reasons. One of them is that they want to show the outside world Cambodia’s downturn caused by the war— Cambodia should be viewed as a lesson to be learnt

⁵ Comment from **Maong Channa** in the survey: She writes, *“They [former KR cadre’s children] are also human beings who have equal rights. [Though] they are children of former Khmer Rouge cadres, they are innocent. It is just the past.”*





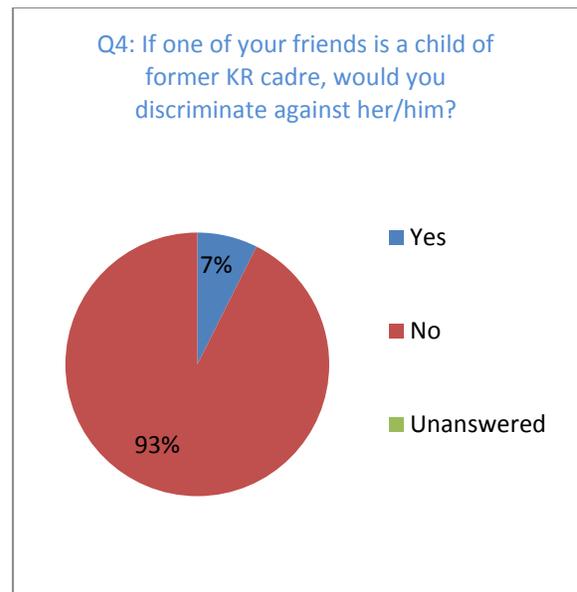
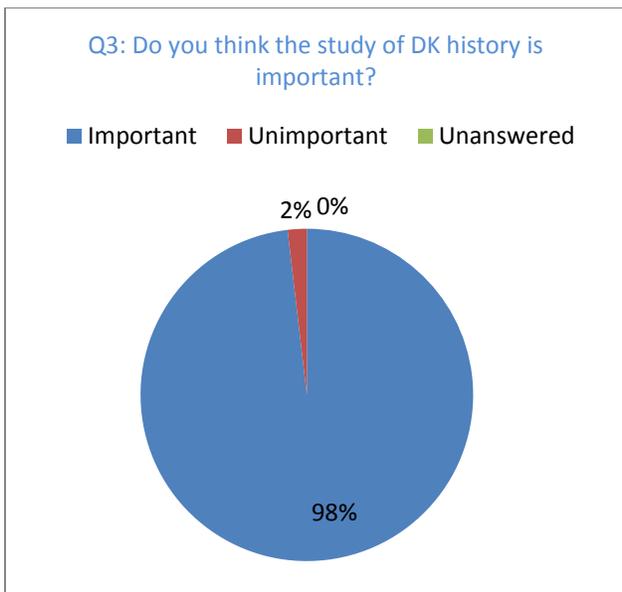
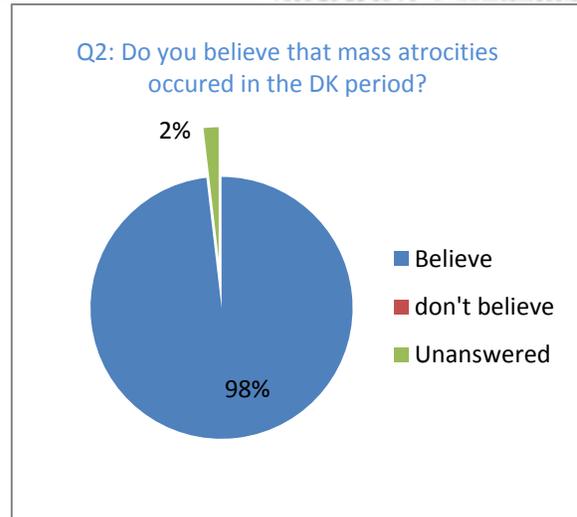
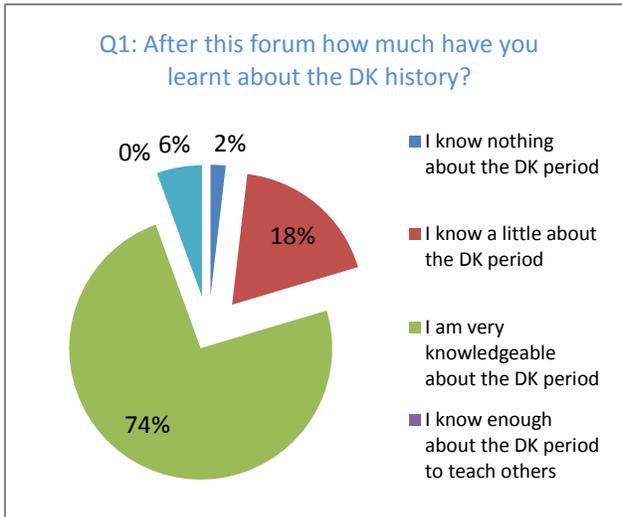
for each county so that they can avoid the possible disaster⁶. Another reason lies on the possible comparative study on high-profile crimes within the region by allowing students to learn interchangeably. *Duon Thida* writes, “*It would allow students to better learn histories of each country in the region. We are able to learn from the other’s history [vice versa], which makes us better aware of histories around the globe.*” However, there is still a different perspective seen basically from a student named Heng Thida, 18, female. She disagrees to have the DK history taught because, accordingly, Thida is not happy to let other countries know about such the regime. She considers it as Cambodia’s internal conflict not to be revealed to the outside. “It is an internal conflict between Khmer and Khmer. We should not spread it to the other counties.” She writes. Understandably, it predicts a scenario where the history is thought to be uncovered.

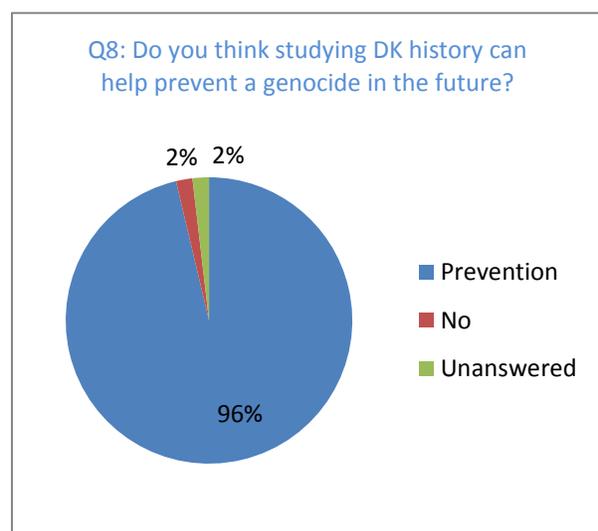
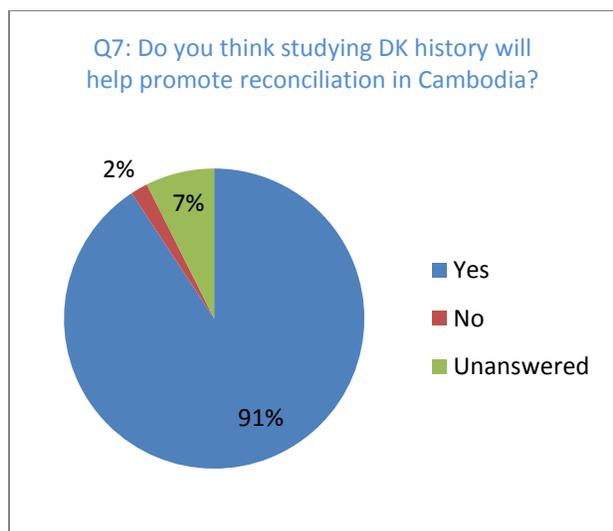
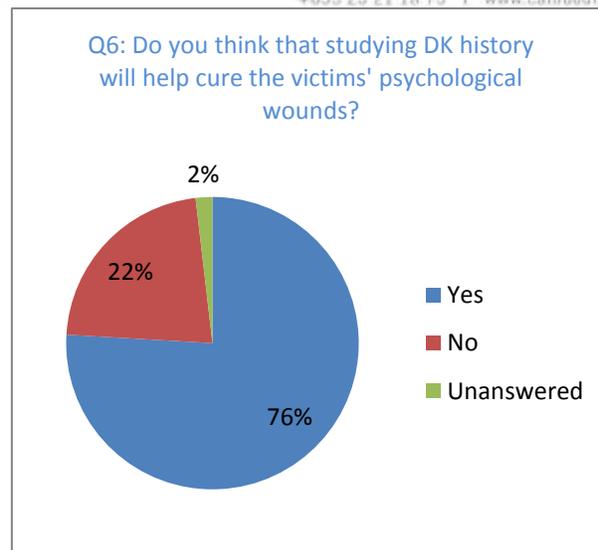
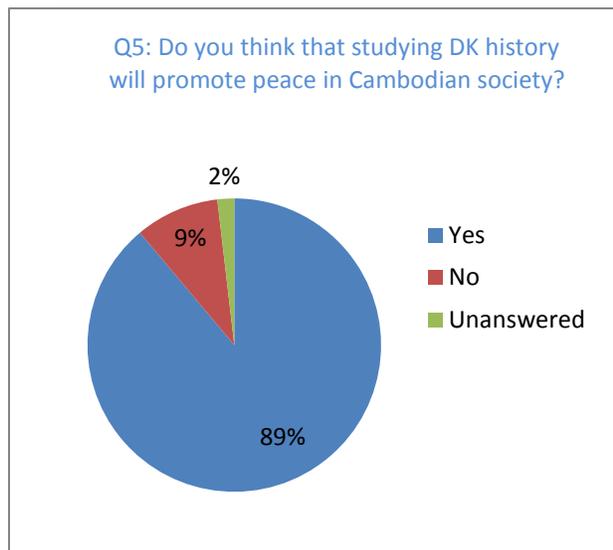
Post-Forum Survey

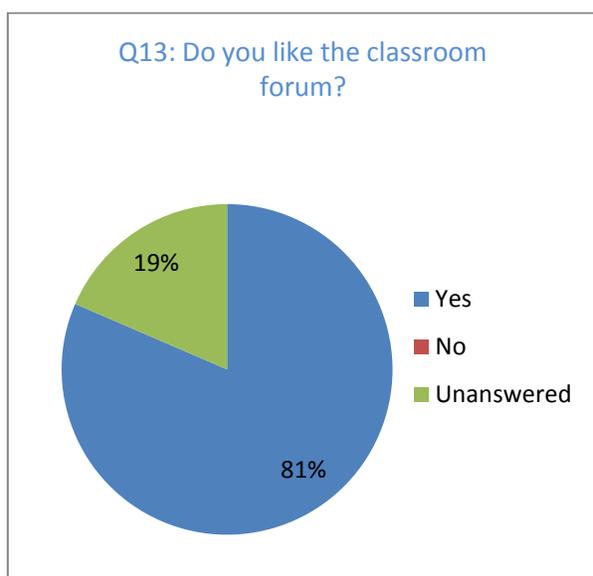
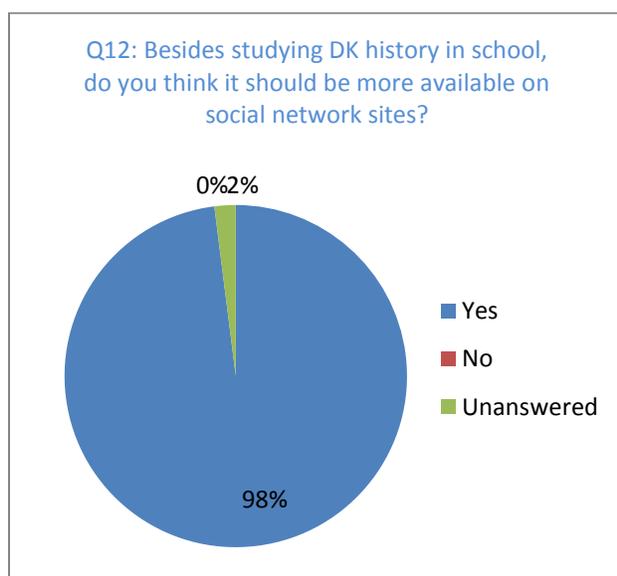
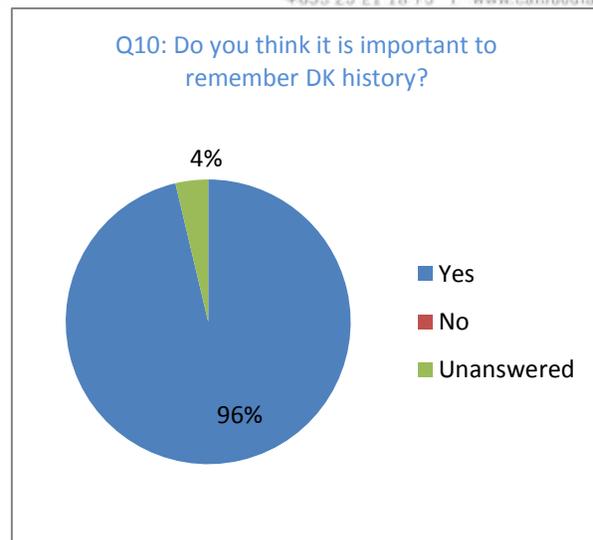
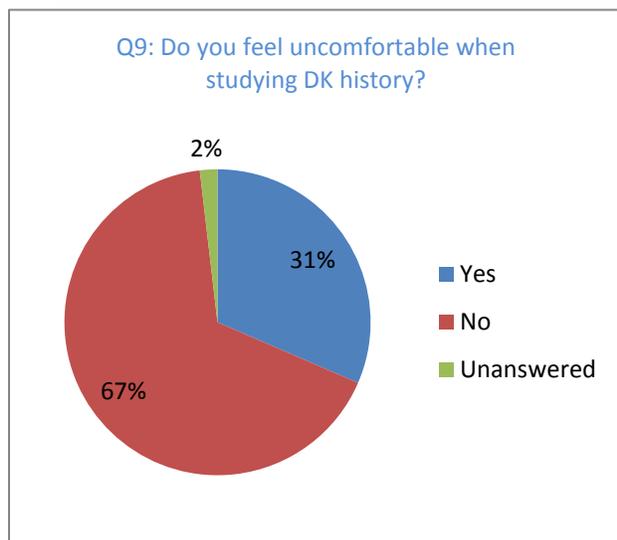
The following are the findings by the post-forum survey designed to stimulate the new insights/inputs which the students have acquired by the end of the forum. The survey includes total 13 questions covering students’ perspectives on extended knowledge, importance of studying DK history, intergenerational discrimination, peace building and reconciliation, availability of DK history on social network and general possible improvements to the forum.

⁶ Comment from **Phat Sanin** in the survey: She writes, “*It should be taught with a purpose of letting other countries in ASEAN know about this regime of darkness. We do not want to them to follow the same path.*”









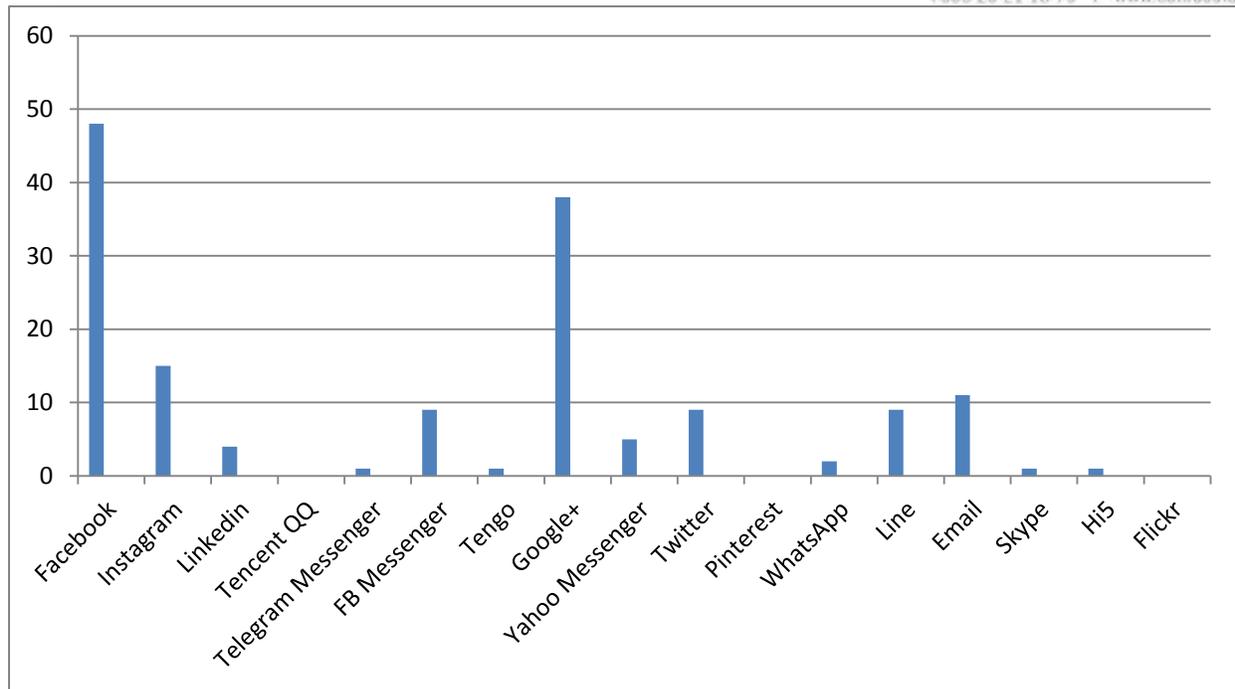


Figure 1: Different social network sites suggested by students for DK history study

V. Discussion

The eventual results show that the number of students, who claim themselves very knowledgeable about DK history, dramatically jumps up to 74 per cent if compared to the pre-forum survey. Such the increase reveals a great achievement by the team with the close and smooth participation from the students and the school. There is no a big change to the data of students who believe in the Khmer Rouge mass atrocities, rising from 96 to 98 per cent, and 98 per cent of them think it is very important to study DK history. And over 90 per cent of students believe that studying DK history helps promote reconciliation and prevent genocide in the future. In a bigger picture, students suggest that DK history education be extended through various social networks; Facebook is the first rank followed by Google+ and Instagram. For the overall rating, it is found that 81 per cent of students like the forum while the rest do not give their answer. The main reason that some students leave it unanswered is due to the time limitation and rush hour which allows them not to be able to answer all questions especially the last ones.

If looking at another interesting question on intergenerational discrimination, we will see that the number of “yes” (discriminate) increases by 2 per cent up to 7 per cent. Deeper



examination on this question reveals an invalid response which triggers unreliability due to misunderstanding or time constraint⁷. Students choose an answer which proves their discrimination, yet in the comment box below they write that they do not discriminate. Actually, in this case it is more reliable to refer to their comments rather than tick.

VI. Conclusions

From the start to the end, the forum in Russey Keo high school runs smoothly without any concerned problems with close and helpful collaboration from the school director and his staff. Further than their appreciated collaboration, the students are enthusiastic to learn and acquire much knowledge in terms of genocide awareness and prevention in addition to the existing in-school syllabus. Beyond that impactful knowledge acquisition, K-W-L method can be considered helpful in the way that students get to learn things from their own interest. The presenter, Pheng Pong-Rasy, does a good job in stimulating students' existing knowledge in *K section* and fulfilling the doubts written on the *W* column afterward. Ideally it would be even more interesting to see head teachers participate the forum so that they are able to learn from the K-W-L teaching method. In case of scientific surveys conducted ahead and behind the forum, it shows that students' knowledge and awareness about Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979) increase in certain extent. Because our intension is not interrupt the allocated time at each school, in general speaking, time limitation remains our big challenge which discourages students to give proper answer to the surveys. Also, in some cases, limited time frame makes us struggle to have a very comprehensive and perfect discussion amongst students. In a word, it is a simple initiative at small scale but with long-term and highly contagious effects spread from students to another.

⁷ 4 students tick "yes" to presume intergenerational discrimination against former KR cadres' child. However, one of them, **Uth Seyha**, ticks "yes" yet writes on the comment box below that [he] does not discriminate, which indicates his misunderstanding/ confusion. Furthermore, the other go for the same selection "yes" without leaving any comments simply to all questions in the survey. This can be assumed that they are suppressed by time at the end of the forum.

