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GENOCIDE EDUCATION IN CAMBODIA

DEMOCRATIC KAMPUCHEA HISTORY EDUCATION

FINAL REPORT

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

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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 were initially held in 15 Phnom Penh high schools to give students their first lesson on Democratic Kampuchea history. The aims of the forum are 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 for the future. To date, the forums have served 950 students.



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

The Documentation Center of Cambodia with the support of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, has conducted a series of classroom forums on the history of Democratic Kampuchea across high schools in Phnom Penh. This project forms part of DC-Cam's wider Genocide Education Program.

Of the 15 scheduled forums, all 15 have been conducted. In these forums, 950 high schools students (primarily in Grade 11 and Grade 12) were introduced to the history of the Khmer Rouge period. The 15 schools, their locations and the date of their forum are listed as follows:

No.	High Schools	Locations	Forum Date	Student Number
1	Boeng Keng Kang	Chamkamon	Jan 8 th 2016	96
2	Tuol Svay Prey	Chamkamon	Jan 15 th 2016	60
3	Tuol Tompong	Chamkamon	Jan 29 th 2016	42
4	Chea Sim Chhuk-Va	Prek Pnov	Feb 12 th 2016	34
5	Chhumpouvoan	Por Senchey	Feb 19 th 2016	100
6	Bunrany Hun Sen Arunvatey	Por Senchey	Mar 4 th 2016	54
7	Tuol Ampel	Dangkor	Mar 18 th 2016	101
8	Preah Sisovath	Doun Penh	Apr 1 st 2016	35
9	Pong Toek	Dangkor	Apr 4 th 2016	30
10	Bunrany Hun Sen Wat Phnom	Duon Penh	May 6 th 2016	39
11	Chak Ang-Re	Meanchey	May 20 th 2016	70
12	Chba Ampov	Meanchey	Jun 3 rd 2016	157
13	Prek Eng	Chba Ampov	Jun 17 th 2016	53
14	Russey Keo	Russey Keo	Jun 24 th 2016	54
15	Bakk Touk	7 Makara	Jul 8 th 2016	25
Total	15 High Schools	10 Districts	15 Forums	950



Each forum is two hours long and follows a repeatable structure. This structure includes:

- 1) a pre-forum survey,
- 2) a Know-Want-Learn (KWL) Chart,
- 3) a PowerPoint presentation detailing historical events,
- 4) a screening of a short video on Tuol Sleng Prison in 1979, Liberation Zone in 1973, and Children of Cambodia in 1980
- 5) a section outlining the importance of Democratic Kampuchea history education and finally,
- 6) a post-forum survey
- 7) the distribution of *A History of Democratic Kampuchea 1975-1979* textbook to all present students.

This process will be described in detail in the Methodology section.

The surveys allow for data to be collected from students. This data has been analyzed to measure the impact of the classroom forums. The results, averaged across the 15 forums, are discussed later in this report. Conclusions on the success of the project are drawn from these results at the end of the report.

Objectives

Borne out of the belief that Cambodia's future is directly correlated to its understanding of the past, this project was launched to provide a holistic, balanced and detailed analysis of the Khmer Rouge period to high school students. By providing this analysis to Cambodia's youth, the objective is to ensure this history is not lost before it is reconciled and that lessons have been learnt from it.

Beyond giving students a solid factual understanding of Democratic Kampuchea history, the forums aim to demonstrate 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.



Thus, the forums intend to show the value of studying history as an effective medium of change going forward. By altering the attitudes students have to their own Country's past, this project wants to inspire a generation more conducive to collaboration and peace. The structure of the forum encourages students to take ownership of their history; to recognize its proximity to their own lives and to their families. In this way, history education, specifically genocide education, hopes to create long-lasting dialogue that bears the fruit of peace, healing and genocide prevention for future generations.

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 across Cambodia. These high school forums intend to be a catalyst for the establishment of a formal curriculum.

Methodology

Throughout the two hour long high school forums, six main practices are used. These include: 1) two surveys (pre-survey and post-survey), 2) a KWL (Know What Learn) chart, 3) a silent video on Tuol Sleng Prison, 4) PowerPoint presentation of DK history, 5) PowerPoint presentation of the importance of studying DK history, 6) DK textbook distribution.

On occasion, this structure was altered to accommodate time constraints, technical issues, guest speakers and the wishes of Principals. For example, the KWL chart was not used at Chak Ang-Re High School and was instead replaced with 15 minutes for students' questions, upon the Principal's request for as much student interaction as possible. Each question was then answered in turn by the forum coordinator.

The standard structure of the forum is outlined below:

I. Pre-Forum Survey



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

II. KWL Chart & Presentation

The purpose of a KWL chart is to differentiate what students already know from what they want to learn and, ultimately, to see what they learnt from the forum. KWL charts allow students to think more actively about the subject matter and engage with the core issues presented. They are an interactive form of assessment to maintain focus and enthusiasm throughout the forum. The process of KWL is described below.

1. Following the collection of the pre-surveys, students are quizzed on what they already *Know* about Democratic Kampuchea history (K-Chart). This provides a base for the forum, informing the team leaders where gaps in student knowledge may be and where student knowledge is strong.
2. From here, students are asked what they *Want* to learn (W-Chart). In this section, students are given the opportunity to set their own learning objectives for the forum and guide the areas of discussion. This informs team leaders where student curiosity lies and what topics should be explored in further depth during the presentation.
3. The visual PowerPoint presentation gives a detailed overview on the history of Democratic Kampuchea. Images, graphs and personal stories enrich the telling of the history. Based on the W-Chart, the narrative is tailored to match



the students' learning objectives in order to provide the most informative session for that particular group.

4. After concluding the presentation, students are asked what they *Learned* (L-Chart) from it. This review reinforces the key takeout points from the forum and aims to construct a path for further learning beyond the session.

III. Film Screening: Tuol Sleng Prison in 1979, Liberation Zone in 1973 and Children of Cambodia in 1980

After the KWL Charts and the PowerPoint presentation, students are shown a silent video introducing them to the horrors of Prison S-21 (also known as Tuol Sleng Prison). 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. Importance of Learning Democratic Kampuchea History

Once the facts of Democratic Kampuchea are presented to students, it is crucial to highlight the importance of learning this history. The aim of the PowerPoint presentation is to teach the history. The aim of the forum as a whole is to teach the importance of this history. For students to continue their interest in learning about Cambodia's past, they must realize how vital the practice of remembrance is to Cambodia's future. With this in mind, three main reasons are presented to students:

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.*

V. Post-Forum Survey

Post-forum surveys measure the students' level of knowledge after the learning section of the forum. The survey asks 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 are the same as the pre-forum survey and so allow us to make informed comparisons on the forum's impact. Additionally, the post-forum survey asks students how they now felt about promoting peace, healing, reconciliation and the prevention of future genocide in Cambodia.

The post-forum survey also assesses 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. In this way, the survey seeks to gauge how the mindset of the students have changed as a result of the history lesson.

VI. Distribution of DK Textbook

At the end of the forum, all present students are provided with the *A History of Democratic Kampuchea 1975-1979* textbook in a bid to inspire further research and deeper understanding. Students are urged to read the textbook and to think critically about its content. This is not only to prepare them for any examination questions, but also to spark independent scholarship.

Observations



Looking beyond the content of the forums and instead analyzing student responses, body language, student interviews and classroom demographics, six significant observations emerged:

1. Classroom forums have empowered students of ethnic minorities to talk about and reconcile their families' stories. By highlighting the struggles of minority groups such as Cham Muslims throughout the genocide, the forum acts to elevate the learning experience of minority students who have previously had their history ignored or undermined in the classroom.
2. The program has encouraged greater dialogue between students and their parents, creating family unity and a better informed youth. Many students expressed how their parents may find the content of the textbook difficult to read, however these students also expressed their gratitude for having the opportunity to learn more about their parents' lives under the Khmer Rouge.
3. The environment cultivated in the forums gave students the confidence to ask questions they would not be able to ask in other, more traditionally-run classes. Students felt emboldened and motivated by the openness of the forum.
4. Linking to this, female students from across all fifteen forums commented on how comfortable and empowered they were made to feel. Indeed, throughout the course of the program, female students actually asked more questions than male students, highlighting the strong gender equality inculcated by the team leaders.



5. Students made clear across interviews and survey responses that the forum had sparked their interest in DK History. Moreover, it had given them the impetus to conduct their own research beyond the session.
6. Finally, the forums garnered a lot of recognition from reputable international scholars and educators. This trend suggests that the project holds a level of global legitimacy that is important in order to attract the best talent and resources to develop a prominent education program in Cambodia.

These observations underline the positive impact the program has had beyond the aims it set out to achieve. The open and active class structure has been beneficial to all students, regardless of gender or ethnic background and has helped to express the commonality of the genocide – it affected all Cambodians in some way. Further, the teaching style has inspired students to pursue this subject in more depth and continue individual research through their high school careers. Thus, the above observations demonstrate how the classroom forums have benefited the learning experience and aspiration of the students, in addition to the factual content that was taught.

Results and Discussion

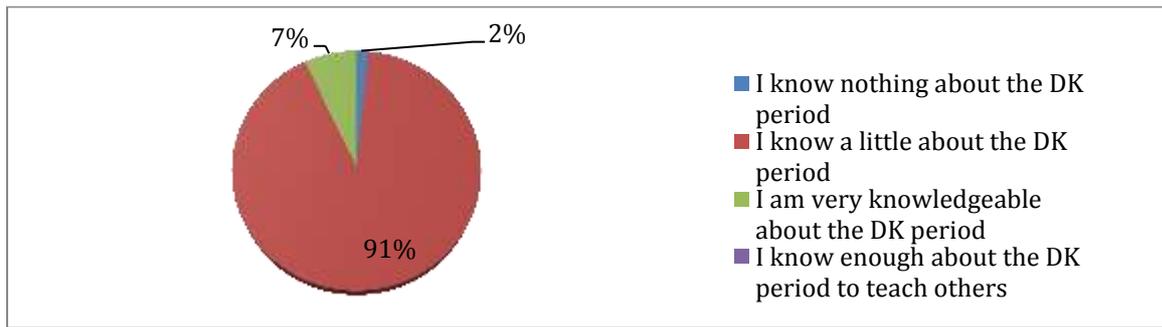
All the results from the pre-forum surveys and the post-forum surveys are compiled into graphs and pie charts using Microsoft Excel. Four questions are kept the same across both surveys, so as to compare the difference the forum made to the students' knowledge on DK history.

The graphs below show averages of the data collected across the first fourteen forums.

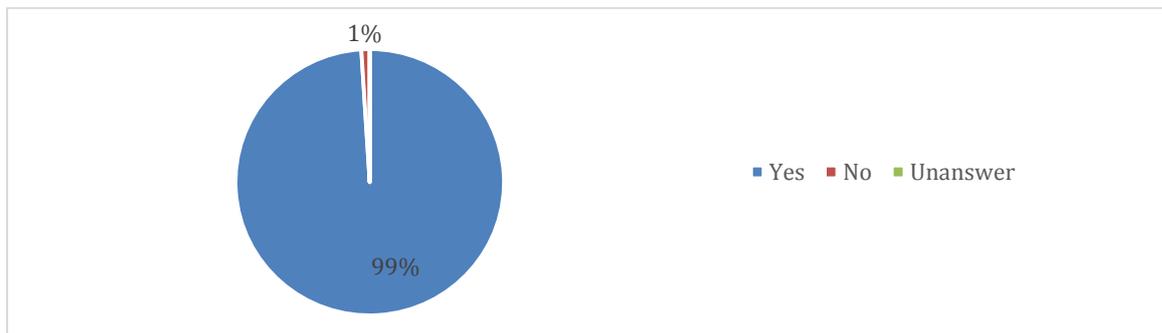
I. Pre-Forum Survey

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

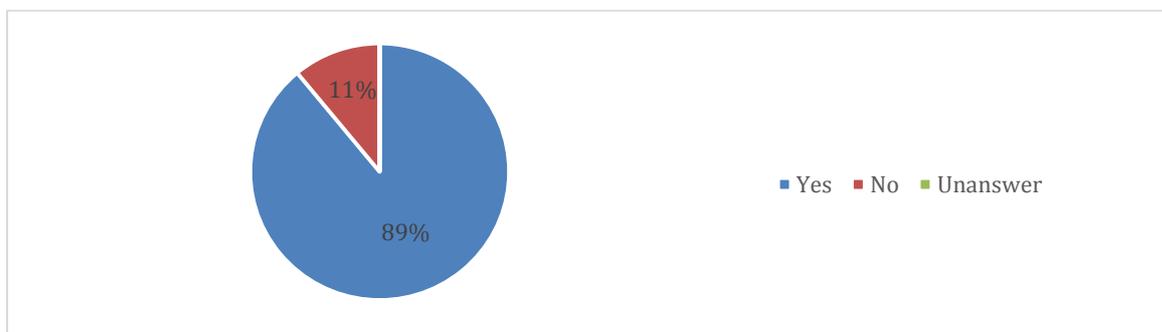
1. How would you describe your knowledge of DK history?



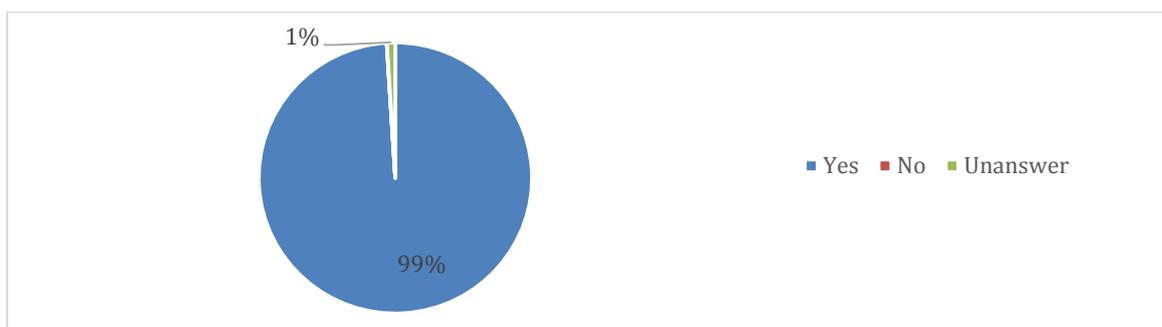
2. Do you believe that mass atrocities occurred during the DK regime?



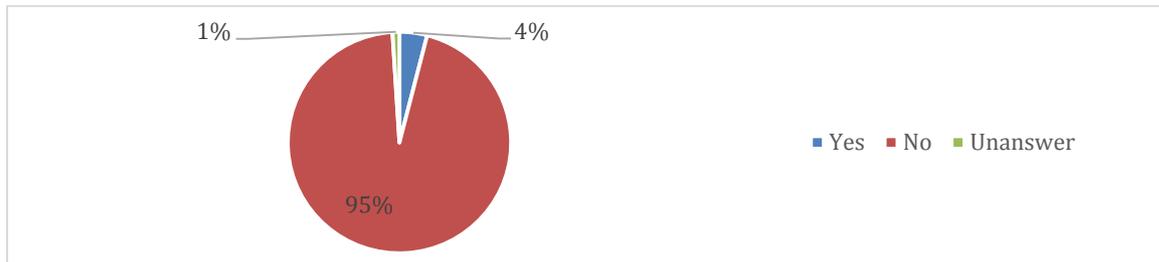
3. Have you ever talked about the DK period with your parents or people who lived during this time? What was the talk about?



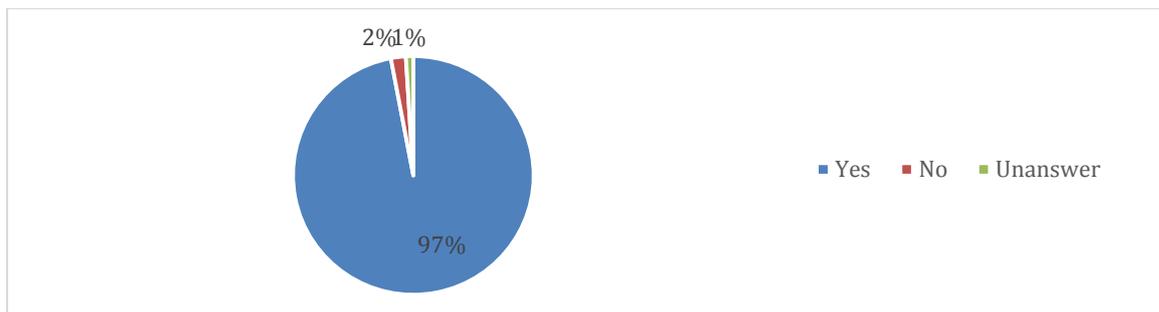
4. Do you think the study of a history of DK is important?



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



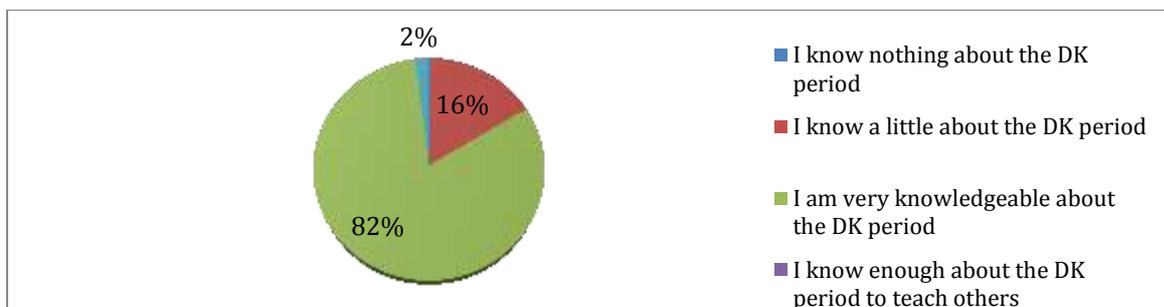
6. *Could the history of DK be taught in schools across Cambodia and ASEAN?*



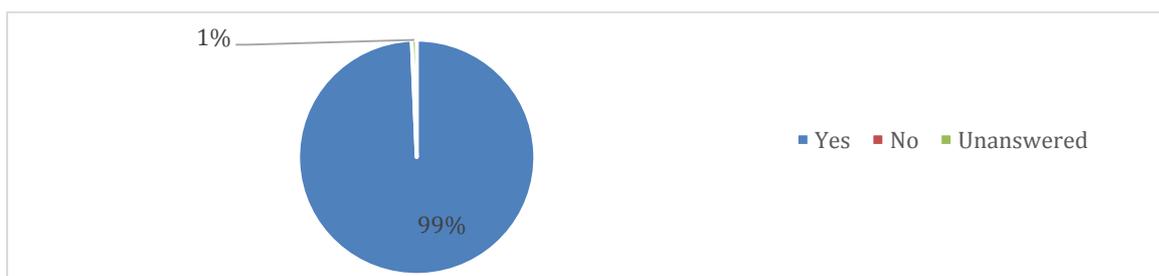
II. Post-Forum Survey

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

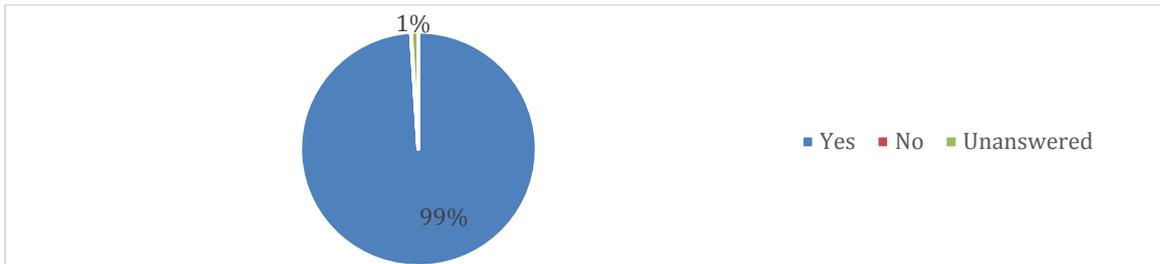
1. *How would you describe your knowledge of DK history?*



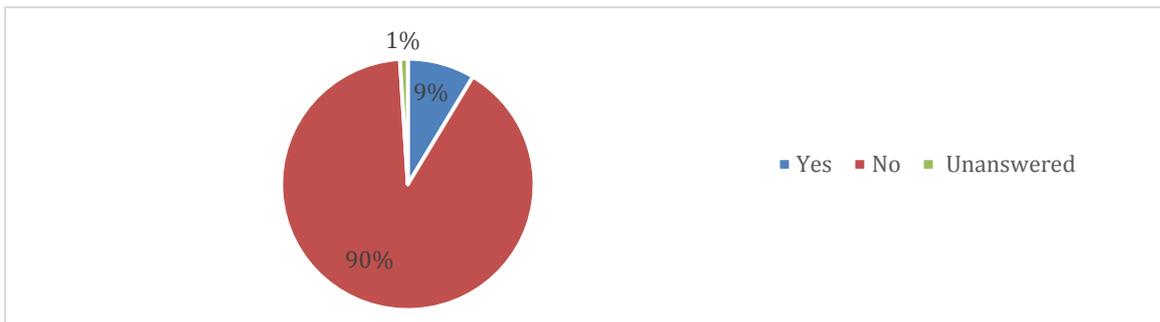
2. *Do you believe that mass atrocities occurred during the DK regime?*



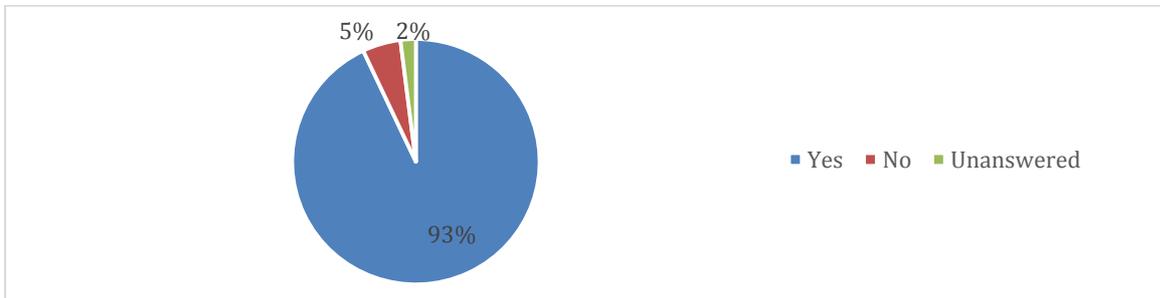
3. Do you think the study of a history of DK is important?



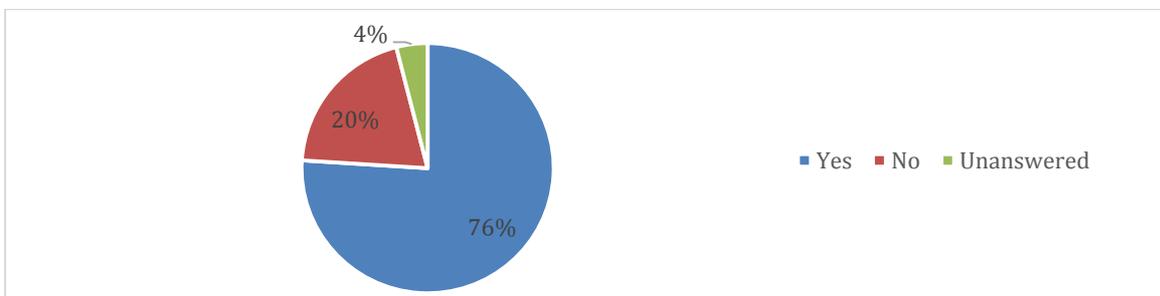
4. If one of your friends is a son/daughter of a perpetrator, would you discriminate against him or her?



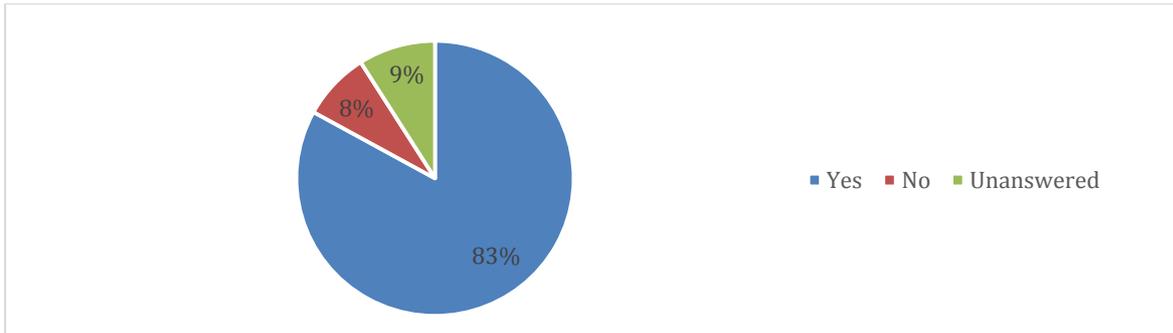
5. Does the study of DK history encourage you to think of building peace in Cambodian society?



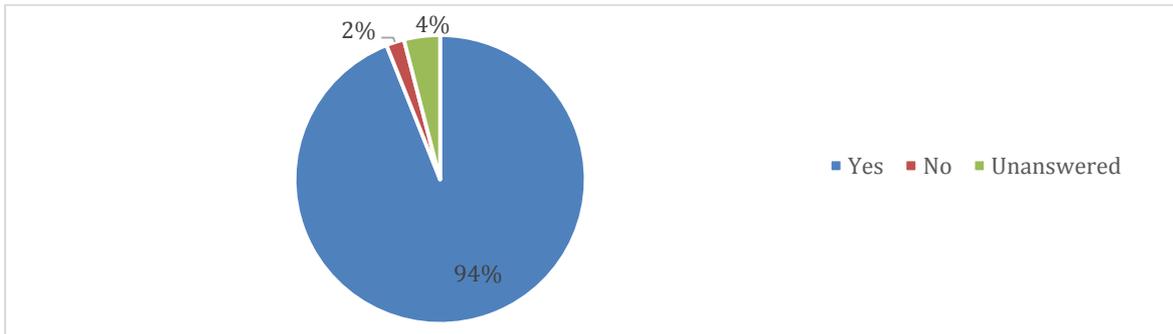
6. Does the study of DK history encourage you to think of healing?



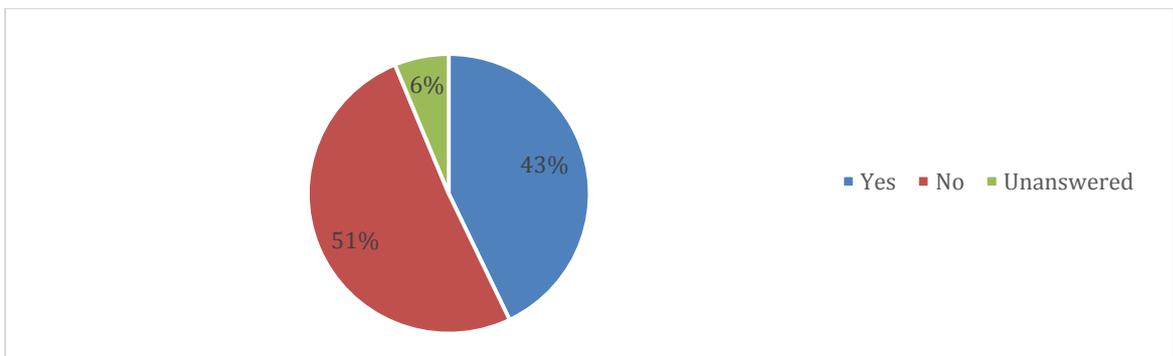
7. Does the study of DK history encourage you to think of reconciliation?



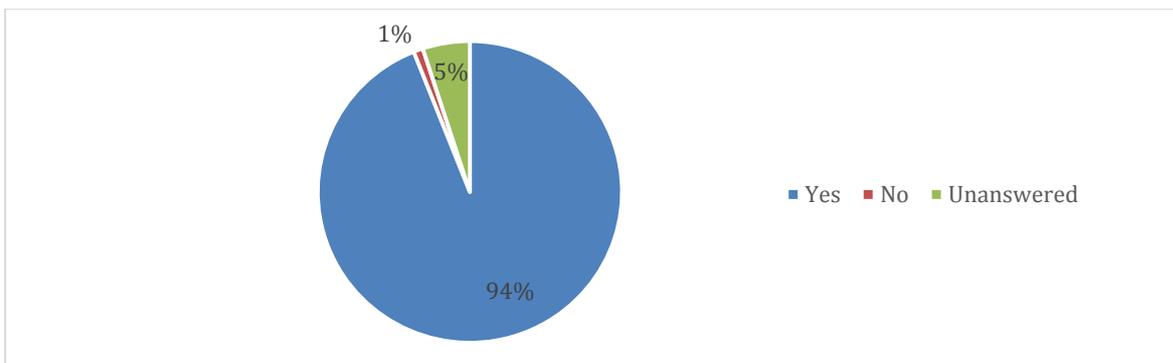
8. Does the study of DK history encourage you to think of prevention of genocide in the future?



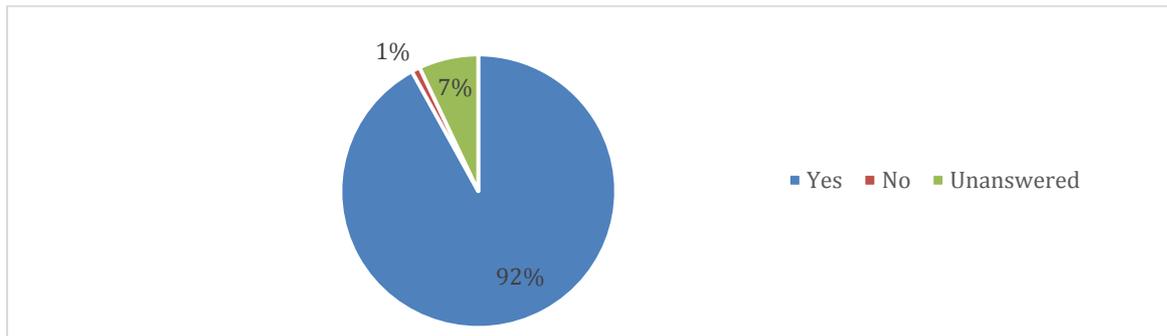
9. Do you feel uncomfortable learning about DK history?



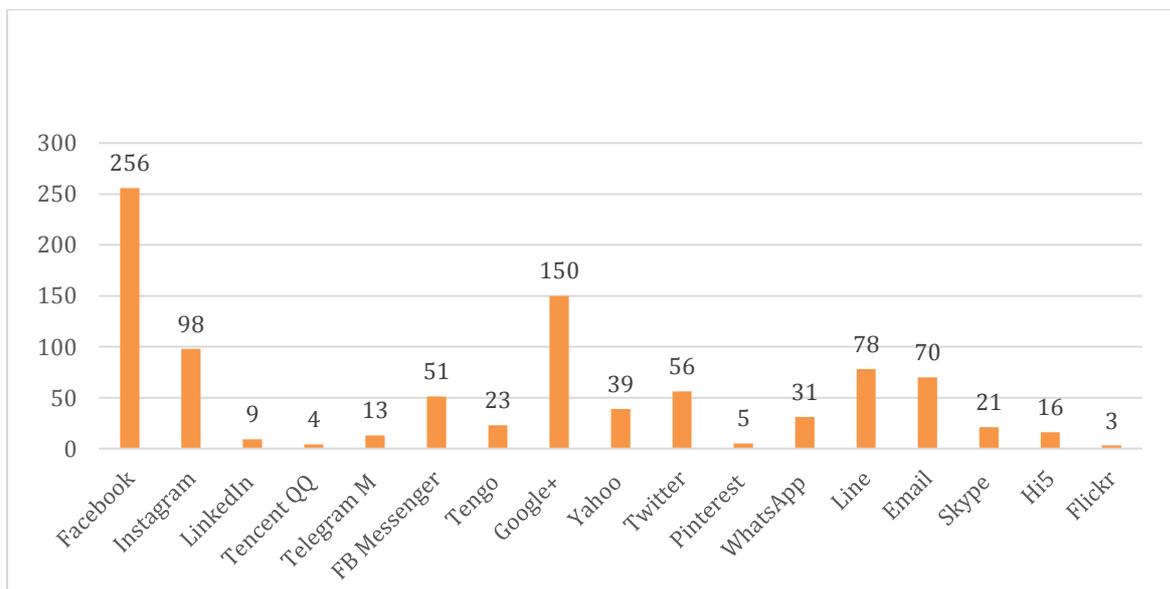
10. Is it important to remember the history of Democratic Kampuchea?



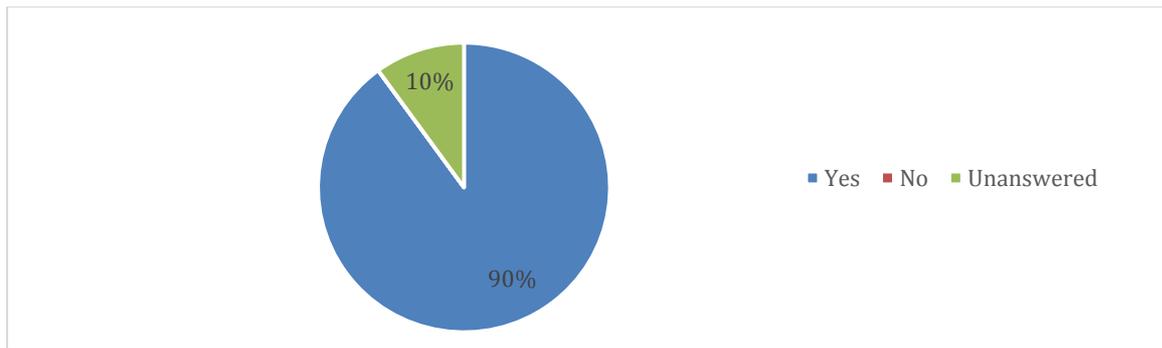
11. Besides studying Khmer Rouge history inside a classroom or in a public space, do you think this history should be posted on social networks for additional learning and learning materials?



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 have gained a greater understanding of Democratic Kampuchea history from the forums. Notable comparisons between the beginning and the end of the forums include:

- **941** students (99%) believe DK history education is important.
- **922** students (97%) want this history to be taught across Cambodia and ASEAN.
- **893** students (94%) believe remembrance of this history is important.
- **874** students (92%) expressed a desire for additional information and resources on DK history to be posted on social media.

These numbers make an observable point. They all show an overwhelming appetite for history education on Democratic Kampuchea in Cambodia and beyond. From a sample size of 950 students across 15 high schools, it is evident that there is a demand to learn about history of this kind. The numbers correspond to a palpable curiosity amongst students, who not only value the education for what it is intrinsically (a telling of Cambodia’s history) and what it aims to achieve (peace, reconciliation and genocide prevention), but also are keen to learn more beyond the forums (via social media and other online resources). These are all strong indications that genocide education is required and, more importantly, wanted.



- Only **67** students (7%) said they were very knowledgeable about DK History before the forum. After the forum, this number rises to an incredible **779** (82%).
- **884** students (93%) are now encouraged to build peace in Cambodia due to the forum.
- **893** students (94%) want to prevent genocide following the forum.
- **789** students (83%) seek reconciliation as a result of the forum.

These four statistics build an equally compelling story. They all highlight the forum's effectiveness to achieve its aims. Specifically, a noticeably high percentage of students left the forum more informed about DK History, more likely to build peace and reconciliation, and more eager to prevent genocide in the future. These findings suggest that the curriculum developed for the program is working. The majority of students who received the forum gleaned positive insight which bodes well not only for further genocide education programs, but also for Cambodia's future as a whole.

In summary, the statistics presented above prove two things:

1. Genocide education is *wanted* in high schools.
2. Genocide education is *working* in high schools.

Conclusions

The data and the observations both indicate that the project has been successful in achieving its objectives as well as having a positive impact on the pedagogy of the schools in which they were held.

Specifically, the evidence shows that history education is crucial for the long-term prosperity of Cambodia. As set out in the objectives, the forums prove that history education is an effective medium for changing attitudes toward peace, reconciliation, healing, and genocide prevention. Whilst the full effects of these



positive changes may not be known for a while, the simple fact is that over 880 students are now encouraged to build peace and prevent genocide as a result of this education, whereas prior to the forum there may have been none. Add to this the statistics underlining the demand for genocide education amongst students and their recognition of its importance, it is thus plausible to posit the notion that a countrywide approach would be welcomed amongst high school students. The global academic interest created by these forums act as further evidence that this education is required and legitimate.

Another conclusion that can be drawn is the success of the forum's structure itself. The presentation, the KWL Chart, the surveys and the video develop an open and engaging environment that ultimately leads to statistically positive results. This format is easily replicable and its simplicity is conducive to countrywide expansion.

Genocide education in Cambodia has the potential to open the nation up to the world. Not only does it offer the opportunity for a more peaceful and stable domestic future, it also affords the opportunity for international links to be made via the themes of universal human rights, collaborative research and increased outward outlook of students. Cambodia still lives under the shadow of its past as education was greatly impacted by the Khmer Rouge. In order for the nation to rise out of this shadow, it must provide a multi-faceted education system that goes beyond STEM to create more broad-minded, complete students. Without the context of history, a future cannot be built. Understanding the genocide is a key step in building Cambodia's future.