

EDUCATION ON KHMER ROUGE HISTORY IN CAMBODIA (1975-1979)

REPORT

Classroom Forum on “The importance of Studying Khmer Rouge History (1975-1979)”

Phsar Daem Thkov High School

Report by: *Orn Vannara*

I. Introduction

In the early morning of February 3, 2017, with beautiful weather, the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam), in collaboration with Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) and with the support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), conducted its 17th classroom forum on “The Importance of Studying History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)” at Phsar Daem Thkov High School in Phnom Penh. One hundred and five (105) participating grade-12 students attended the forum, which was begun at 8 a.m. in the meeting hall of the school. The team was thankful to the School principal for providing a comfortable meeting hall for the forum, where there was no external sounds likely to disturb students. Therefore, they were able to pay full attention to the classroom forum without being distracted from outside disturbances. This helped the classroom being more efficient in reaching its aim to increase students’ understanding about Democratic Kampuchea. Mr. Jean-Marc Gorelick, deputy director of USAID in Cambodia, also participated to this classroom forum as observer.

This forum included three activities. Mr. Pheng Pong-Rasy presented the Khmer Rouge history and the importance of studying the history of Democratic Kampuchea. Mr. Long Dany explained the interview techniques. Finally, Ms. Sirik Savina and Mr. Men Pechet presented the exhibition on “Forced Transfers” of people during Khmer Rouge Regime. This report describes some of the highlights of the students’ knowledge before and after the classroom; it includes experiences that can be helpful to increase efficiency of future forums in reaching students’ attention and developing their knowledge. The purpose of this forum was to educate students on the history of Democratic Kampuchea (known as Khmer Rouge) as well as to provide a forum for encouraging critical thought, dialogue and debate on how the country’s past reflects its present-day problems and future. The forum’s objectives are to (1) provide students with an opportunity to share and express their personal knowledge on what happened during the Democratic Kampuchea regime; (2) encourage students to think critically on the transitional consequences of this legacy to the current Cambodian society; (3) encourage discussion over this legacy in families and communities; and (4) distribute Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979) textbooks to participating students.

II. Pre-Classroom Forum

A day prior to the classroom forum, the team went to meet the school principal to discuss the program of conducting the classroom forum with his students, the installation of the exhibition of “Force Transfer” and the students’ requests. The official letters from the MoEYS and the Municipal office of Education were given to the school principal. The

exhibition team members went around the compound of the school to see the best location to install the exhibition.

III. Forum Program

This forum gave opportunity to the participant students to talk and discuss about the mass atrocities of Khmer Rouge Regime in 1975-1979. The activities included the following:

1. *Opening the Classroom forum*

DC-Cam's team had requested to the school principal that 90 students from grade 12 participated in these activities. This number was achieved as requested. In addition, we really appreciated the venue as the meeting room was very comfortable for both students and the DC-Cam's work team. To begin with, Mr. Pheng Pong-Rasy, team leader of the Genocide Education Project, introduced the team members to the students and briefly talked about DC-Cam's work so far as well as about the purpose of this forum.

2. *K-W-L Chart*

In order to fill the K-W-L chart, students had 15 to 20 minutes to discuss and to write down what was in their mind about the history of Democratic Kampuchea (DK). Team members and Mr. Rasy had stuck three different papers on the wall in the meeting hall and asked students to write down on them, each of them corresponding to a part of the K-W-L chart: 1) what they knew, 2) what they wanted to know, and 3) what they wanted to learn about history of Democratic Kampuchea (DK). Furthermore, we noticed that students were very active in the classroom and a lot of ideas came up to their mind. Below is what the students have written down during the class what they want to know and what they know:

What they wanted to know

1. What made the KR regime possible?
2. What was the purpose of this regime?
3. Who created this regime?
4. How did the KR regime mistreat people?
5. What were the advantages and disadvantages of this regime?
6. Why was the regime not providing enough food for people?
7. What were the policies of the regime?
8. Why did Khmer Rouge Regime eliminate religions?
9. In which province did most murders occur?
10. Was the Khmer Rouge regime really a cruel one?
11. Were there really massacres during Khmer Rouge Regime?
12. Why did in the Khmer Rouge Regime need to kill people?
13. Why did they evacuate people?
14. Why did they divide the population between 'new people' and 'old people'?
15. What was the process that led to establishment of Khmer Rouge tribunal?
16. How long will the Khmer Rouge tribunal go on?

What they know

1. The eight public policies of the Khmer Rouge
2. The violation of human rights
3. The fact that they defrock Buddhist monks and force them to work in the rice field.
4. Pol Pot was the leader of Angkar (Prime Minister)

5. The food rations during that regime were not sufficient and people didn't have enough food to eat
6. People were forced to work very long time, up to 12 hours a day or more
7. Educated people were murdered
8. Over 3 million Cambodian people died during the KR regime
9. There was forced evacuation from cities to countryside
10. There were forced Marriages
11. Families member were separated
12. People disappeared without any information being displayed about what had happened to them
13. Khmer Rouge trained children to spy on their parents
14. Khmer rouge used illiterate people because it was easier to control their mind
15. Khmer Rouge Regime started on 17 April, 1975 and ended on 7 January, 1979

3. Presentation Summary of DK History

After the K-W-L investigation, Mr. Pheng Pong Rasy, Cambodian Genocide Education Project team leader, started his presentation about Khmer Rouge Regime 1975-1979. Classroom consisted in giving explanations on the following topics: forced transfer from 17 April, 1975; elimination of classes in society; division of society into new classes; search for enemies and clashes with Vietnam; causes of the collapsed of the Khmer Rouge. The team observed that among what really attracted students, the most successful were the pictures from Democratic Kampuchea time, for example, pictures of people working in the construction site. Another noticeable interest for students was about the way Khmer Rouge were punishing prisoners. Students felt very impressed about that and though it was hard to believe.

4. Presentation of the importance of Studying DK 1975-1979

To conclude his presentation, Mr. Rasy asked to the students why it was needed to learn history of Democratic Kampuchea 1975-1979. The relevance of learning Democratic History consists in particular in the following positive results of remembering, studying, understanding and sharing with others:

- favor forgiveness between people within a society;
- end the cycle of revenge;
- favor healing and build a good relationship between victims, perpetrators and children of perpetrators;
- Reconciliation and prevent similar mass atrocities to occur again.

5. Pre-Survey

At the end the presentation of the Khmer Rouge history by Mr. Pheng Pong-Rasy, the team distributed survey papers to the students. They were given 5 to 10 minutes to fill it. This survey was conducted in order to test students' knowledge after the classroom for 2 hours.

6. Presentation of the Interview techniques

Mr. Long Dany, Promoting Accountability Project team leader, gave a presentation of one hour on the interview techniques to the students. To start with, Mr. Dany asked two questions to turn student's attention towards the topic. He requested students to give the definition of the term "Khmer Rouge cadre". The other question he asked students was to know whether they had talked with their parent about Khmer Rouge history. Then Mr. Dany explained the techniques on how to conduct interviews. Once finished, he assigned few groups of two students to practice the lesson in front of the class. One student acted as KR victim and

another as former KR perpetrator. The sitting-on-the-table students watched carefully and paid interest in the conversation.

7. *The Forced Transfer Exhibition*

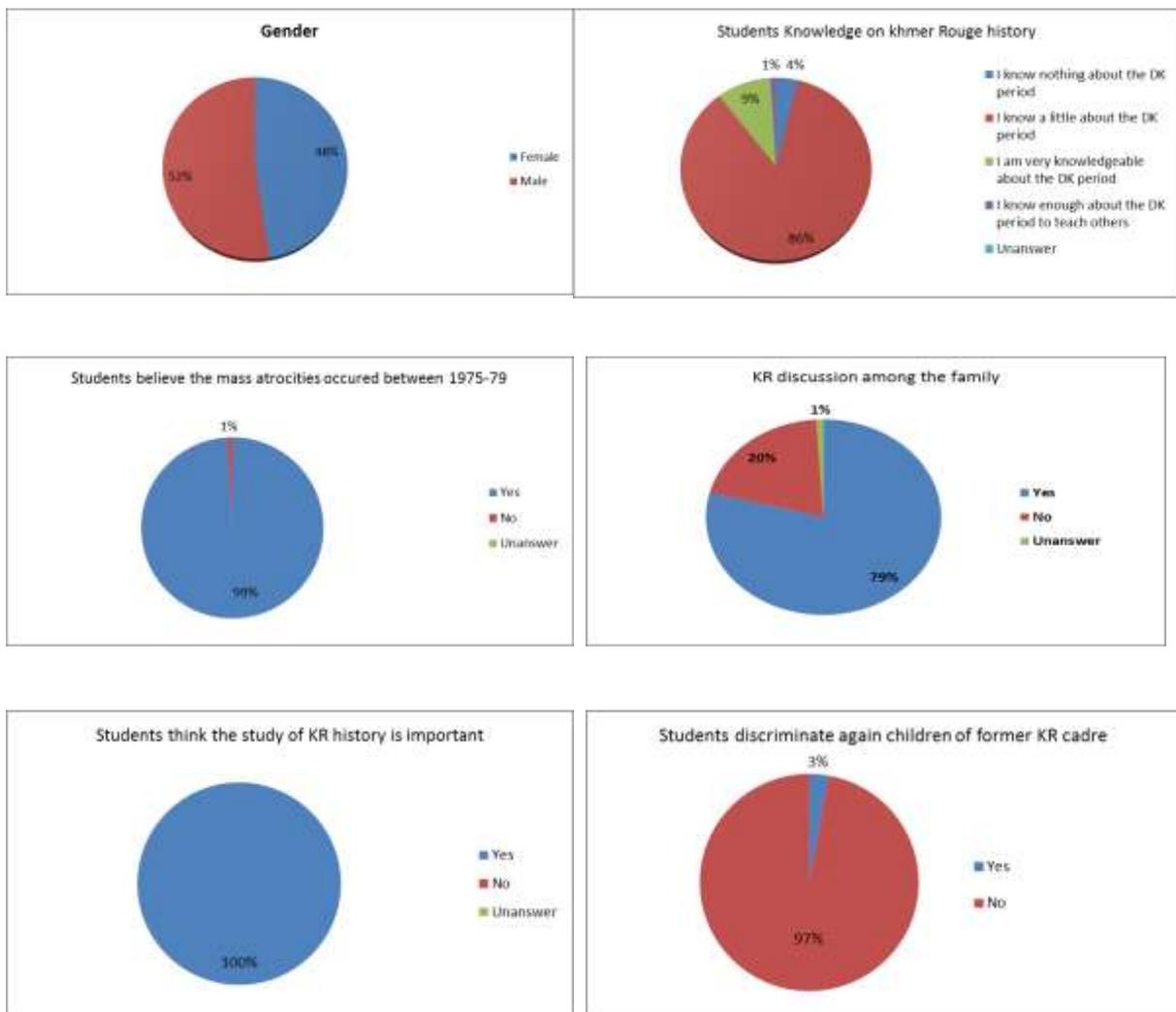
To end the forum, Ms. Sirik Savina explained to the students some facts about the forced evacuation during the Khmer Rouge Regime and how the evacuation separated family members. Ms. Savina asked to the students who already had a look at and read the captions of the panels of the Forced Transfer Exhibition. Only 20 students out of 90 raised their hands. These panels were kept several days inside the school’s compound after the classroom forum.

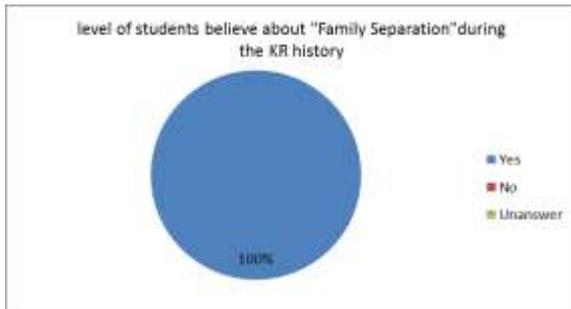
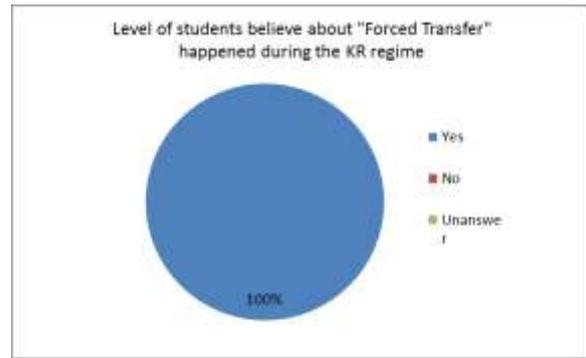
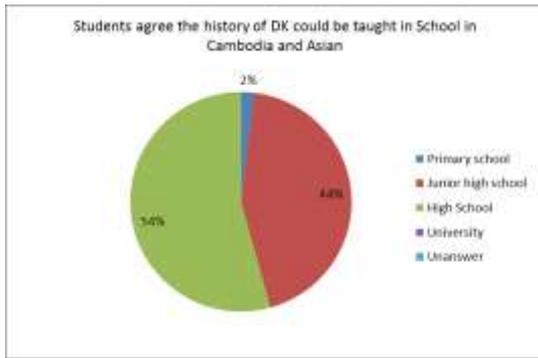
8. *Democratic Kampuchea Textbook Distribution*

After the end of Ms. Savina’s brief presentation about the Forced Transfer Exhibition, DC-Cam’s work team brought 150 copies of Democratic Kampuchea Textbook “A History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)” and distributed them as supplementary reading materials. The students were queuing to receive a textbook. The remaining books were given to the library for those who had missed the classroom.

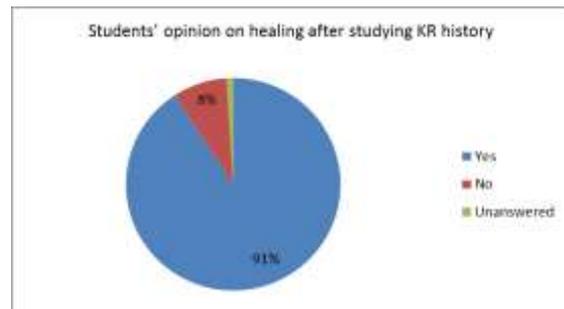
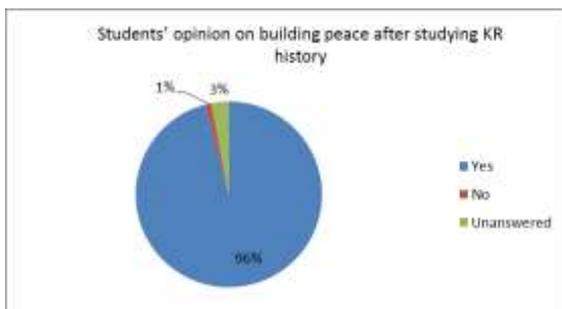
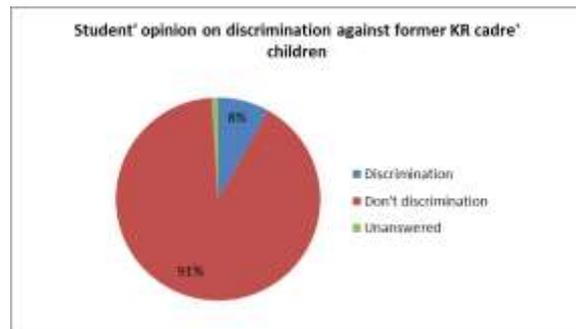
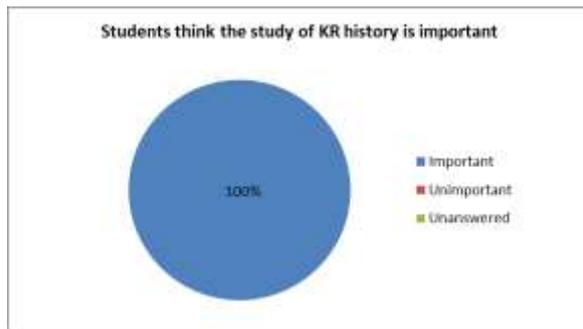
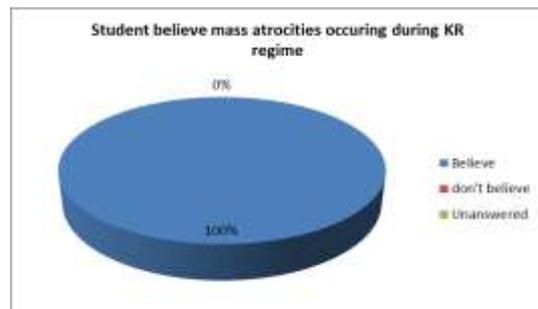
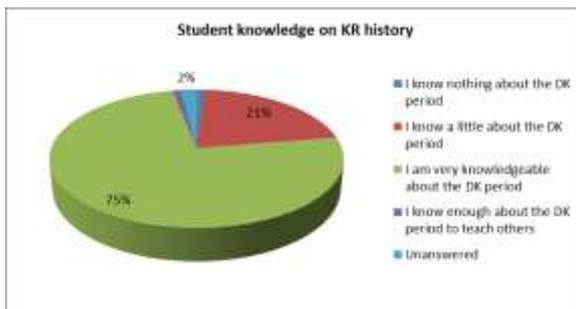
IV. Data from surveys

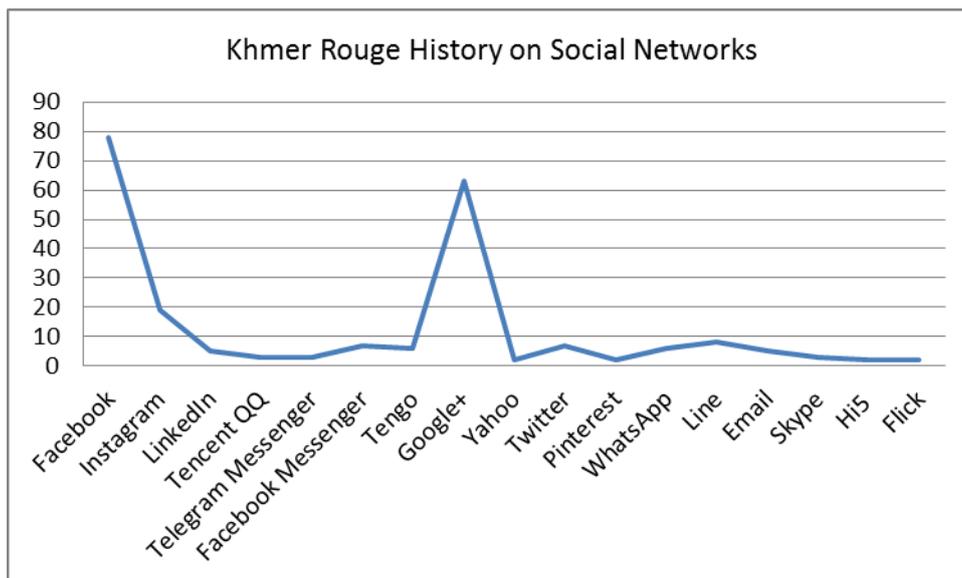
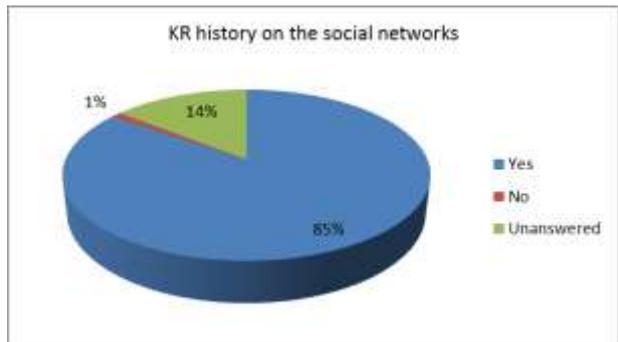
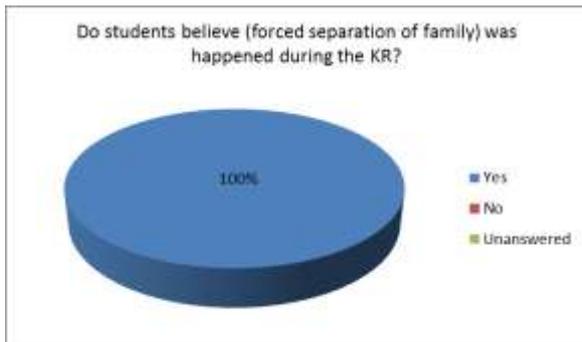
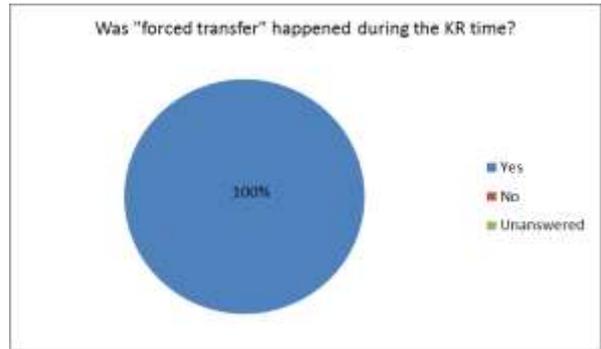
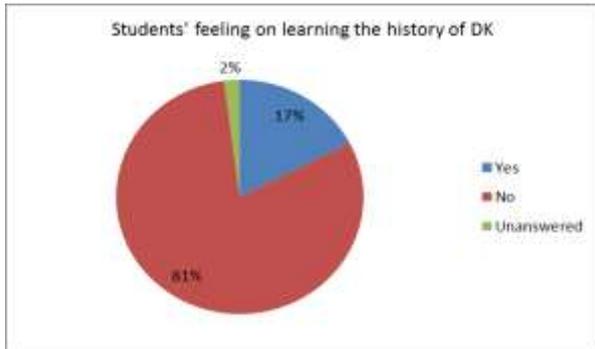
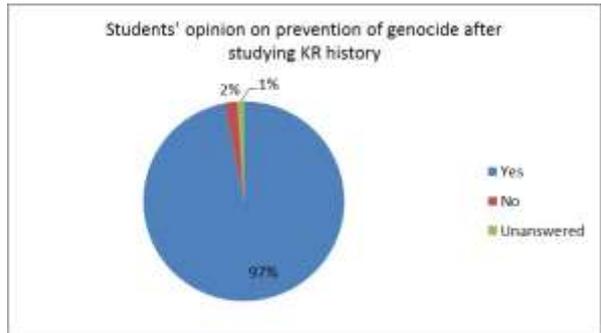
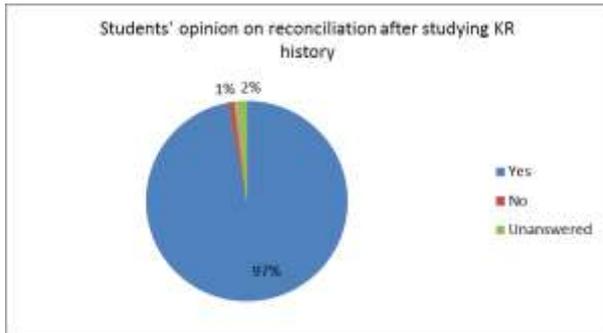
1) Pre-survey

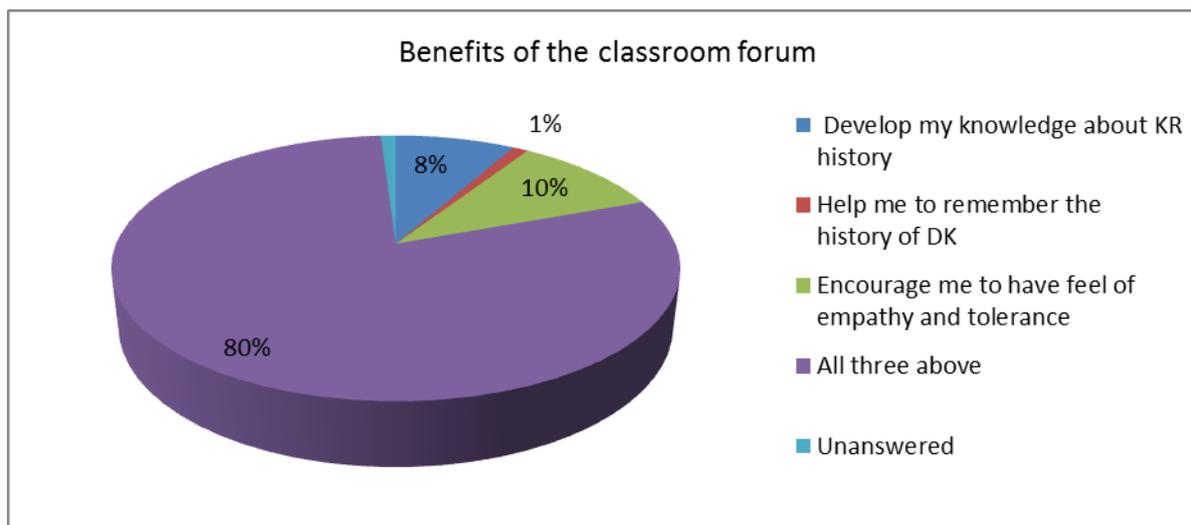
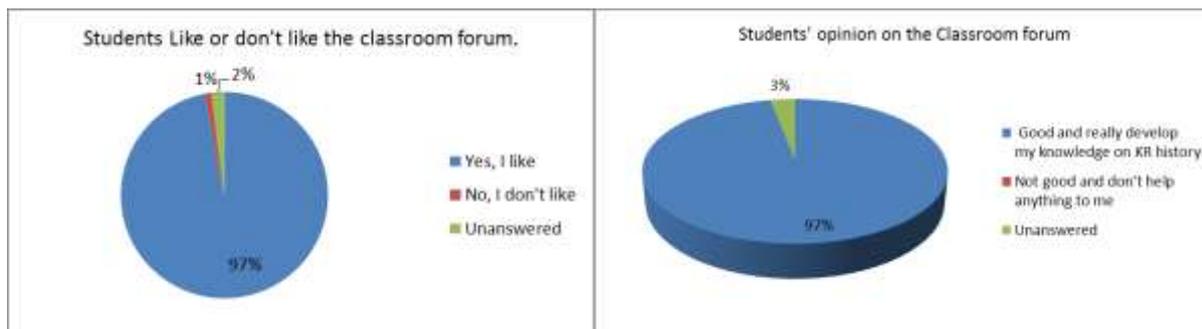




2) Post-Survey:







V. Challenges

At the beginning of the classroom forum, there was an electric black out that disturbed students a bit. However, it didn't take long time to come back. Time constraint was still an issue for the team. Three hours and twenty minutes were needed to end this classroom forum that last from 7:30 to 11:10 and the team tried its best to organize it well. As far as the interview techniques are concerned, the students were losing focus because it was lacking of engagement between instructor and students. Moreover, there was a phone ring inside that disrupted the students' attention. Even students were very active at the beginning; they were also later very shy to share their concern and to answer to the questions which were risen up by work team.

VI. Success Story

Even if there some disturbances happened, the team still continued its work in order to spread knowledge of the history of DK 1975-1979 to the next generation. The reason why we called it a success story is because the classroom forum reached our objectives. Students have time to discuss among themselves about the mass atrocities. We provided time to students to think critically about their past history. They were taught about the importance of studying DK history to build peace, reconciliation, healing, not to discriminate children of perpetrators because the whole Cambodia society is the victim from this period of atrocity from 1975 to 1979.

VII. Conclusion

This 16th forum was held on February 3, 2017 at Phsar Daem Thkov High School. The school principal has a very good collaboration and provided a number of students which the team requested. The event went smoothly though there were some issues our team has occurred. What the team was really happy is that students were very curious and learnt more about the history of DK 1975-1979.