

On becoming a teacher in Cambodia and how we deal with cultural diversity

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-
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 - ITP Week, 12-16 May 2025 PXL University, Belgium

On Cambodia

- 5000 BCE – 800 CE: Stone Age Cambodians
- 500 BCE--500 CE: Funan, Indianization
 - Indianization was not an imposition of control, or colonization
 - Rather, it is the blending and adaptation of cultural elements from outside Cambodia helped to form the ongoing cultural history of the country
- 4-5th Century: Chenla
 - Sambor Prey Kuk in Kompong Thom
- c. 800 – c.1450: Angkor
 - Imperial Power, Urbanism and Ordinary People
- c. 1450 – 1863: The Middle Period – Transformation, Isolation and Outside Pressures
 - The abandoning of Hinduism for Buddhism – fragmentation of the country
 - The rise of a powerful neighbor to the east

On Cambodia

- **1863 – 1953: Colonial Era – Cambodia Enters the Wider World**
 - **Intended failure to educate:** Until World War II, Cambodia had only one high school, no university in Cambodia until World War II, teach to select only the bright and spoil them to serve the colony against their own people and country
- **1953 – 1970: Golden Age of Independence and Khmerization**
- **1970 – 1975: American Puppet**



Phnom Penh April 16, 1975

Dear Excellency and Friend,

I thank you very sincerely for your letter and your offer to transport me towards freedom. I cannot, alas, leave in such a cowardly fashion. As for you, and in particular for your great country, I never believed for a moment that you would have this sentiment of abandoning a people, which has chosen liberty. You have refused us your protection, and we can do nothing about it. You leave, and my wish is that you and your country will find happiness under this sky. But, mark it well, that if I shall die here on the spot and in my country that I love, it is too bad, because we are all born and must die one day. I have committed this mistake of believing in you, the Americans."

Regards,

Sirik Matak

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Sirik Matak", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Gucci



KHMER REPUBLIC: STUDENTS DENOUNCE U.S. AID (1975)

- <https://www.britishpathe.com/asset/200951/>
-



The fall of Phnom Penh to the Khmer Rouge on April 17, 1975. (Roland Neveu / LightRocket via Getty Images)

On Cambodia

- **1975 – 1979: Dark Age**

- The first step was to eliminate all traces of Cambodia's "imperialist" past
- To eliminate remnants of "the oppressor classes," the Khmer Rouge persecuted people they defined as "new people."
- The ability to speak French, for example, revealed one's association with Cambodia's colonial past and made one's commitment to the revolution suspect.
- The Khmer Rouge leadership intended "to smash" this segment of the population, whose allegedly corrupt past precluded their ever attaining a pure revolutionary consciousness.
- In their place, the Party would cultivate a new generation using "songs and poems that reflect good models in the period of political/armed struggle..." whose education was not tainted by the "oppressor classes".

SON SEN



Son Sen was born in 1930 in Tra Vinh province, Vietnam. Before and during the Khmer Rouge regime, he was called Comrade (Brother) Khieu or Brother 89. His wife was Yun Yat, information minister of Democratic Kampuchea following the arrest and execution of Hou Nim. The couple had a son named Sen Reasmey, called Mi, and a daughter named Sen Sorya, called Mon.

On October 9, 1975, the Standing Committee of the CPK put Son Sen in charge of staff and security. From 1976, he became the defense minister of Democratic Kampuchea. Son Sen is reported to have once been so angry with Ieng Sary that he arranged, unsuccessfully, to have a messenger murder him.

Son Sen died on June 10, 1997.

Duch: Symbol of Khmer Rouge horror

2 September 2010



HANDOUT FROM BBC

Duch in the courtroom in July 2010

By Philippa Fogarty
BBC News





School teacher

Duch was born Kaing Guek Eav in the central province of Kampong Thom in the early 1940s.

He excelled at mathematics and so won places at top schools.

After graduation he studied for his teaching certificate in Phnom Penh. It was there that he met students from China and became drawn to communist ideology.

Later he became a high school teacher, earning a reputation as a tough and exacting instructor. But his leftist activism had attracted the attention of the police and in the late 1960s he was detained for several months.

By then conflict was spreading through the country. US and south Vietnamese forces had invaded Cambodia in search of communists from north Vietnam. They bombed swathes of eastern Cambodia, driving villagers into the arms of leftist rebels fighting the unpopular US-backed government.

Duch joined the rebels, who were calling themselves the Khmer Rouge. He served as a sector security chief and, in 1971, spent three months interrogating captured French anthropologist Francois Bizot.

Mr Bizot described him as a "truth seeker", someone "looking for the absolutes in life". He later learned that his release came about because Duch was convinced of his innocence and had appealed on his behalf.

It was a rare act of mercy from Duch, who was soon to be promoted.

Tuol Sleng, of which Duch became the director, was a key part of that killing machine. The regime's most prominent jail, also known as S-21, was housed in a former secondary school in the centre of the city.

Thousands of people - officials from the old government, those accused of being middle class and latterly mainly Khmer Rouge members suspected of disloyalty - were brought to the prison.

Their presence in Tuol Sleng meant that they had already been condemned. Once inside, they were weighed and photographed. Then the questioning began.

Prisoners were told to write detailed confessions setting out their disloyalty. They were told to admit they were spies and implicate friends and family. Refusing to confess was not an option, and those that tried were brutally tortured. Many were tortured anyway.

Top-ranking prisoners were kept alive for months to ensure that their confessions - in some cases methodically checked and annotated by Duch - were complete. Less important inmates were processed in a shorter time. Either way, the final journey was the same.

Prisoners were taken to the "killing fields" at Choeung Ek, a few kilometres outside Phnom Penh. There they were killed, sometimes after digging their own graves.

Children of the condemned were not spared. Today a sign stands next to a tree at Choeung Ek. It reads: "Killing tree against which executioners beat children".

Less than a dozen prisoners are known to have survived incarceration at Tuol Sleng. When a Vietnamese invasion forced the Khmer Rouge from power in January 1979, a photographer found inmates' corpses rotting in the otherwise deserted building.

On Cambodia

- **1979 – 1991: Grey Age**
 - US embargo on Cambodia
 - The embargo significantly hampered Cambodia's ability to rebuild after years of war and genocide. It prevented the country from receiving much-needed economic aid and investment, further exacerbating its poverty and instability

On Cambodia

Working on Internal Peace

1991–1998

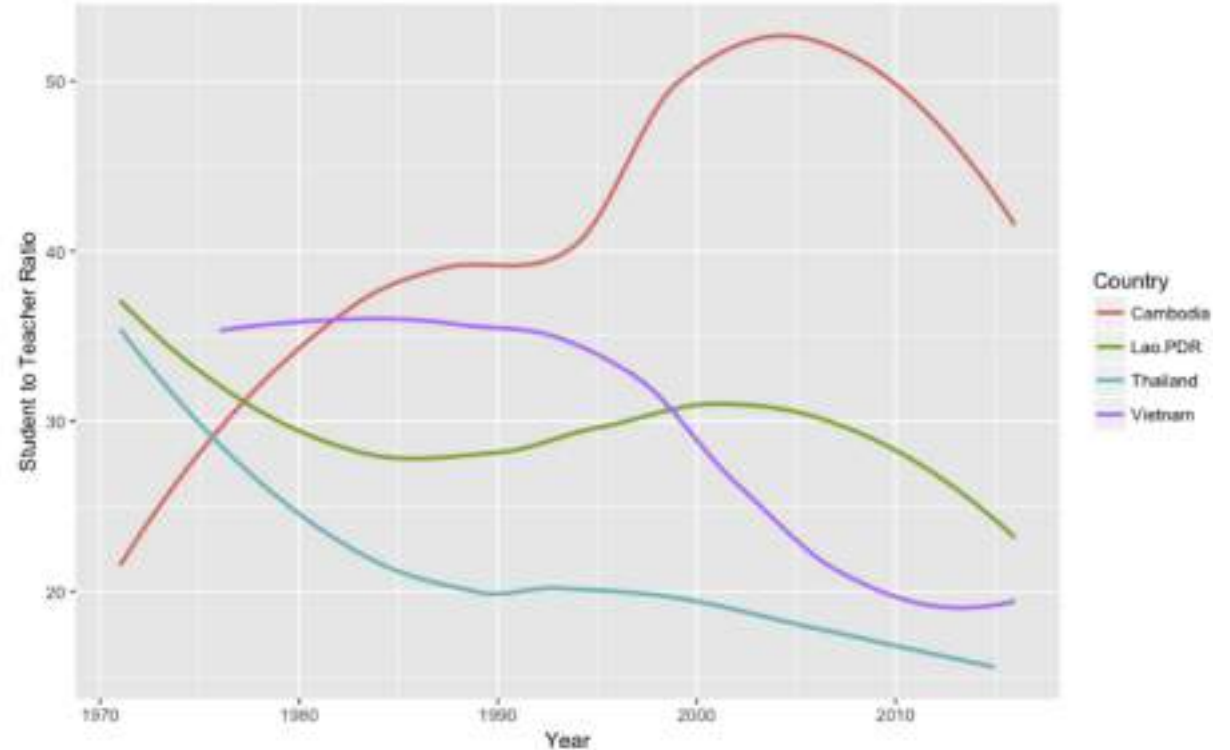
1998–Present

Development

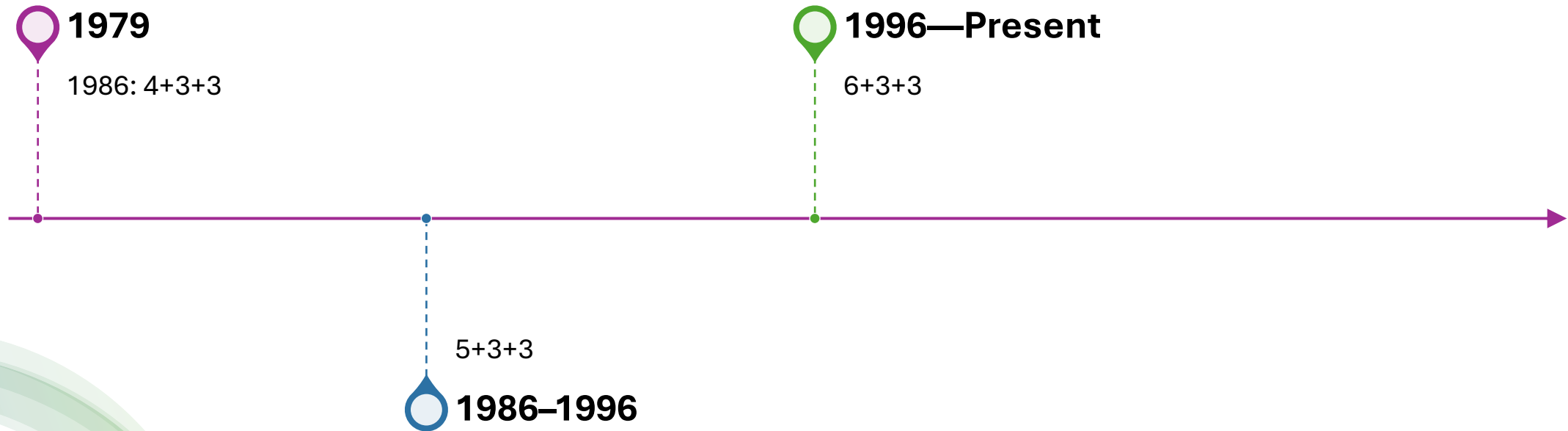
- All Khmer rouge leaders and soldiers surrendered and integrated

On Education System after the Khmer Rouge

- After the Khmer Rouge were ousted, the education system had to be rebuilt from nearly nothing.
- From 1975-1978, the Khmer Rouge conducted a genocidal campaign, killing between approximately 1.2 to 2.8 million Cambodians — one-quarter of the country's population.
- During this senseless violence, more than 90 percent of the country's financial and educated elite were targeted and killed.

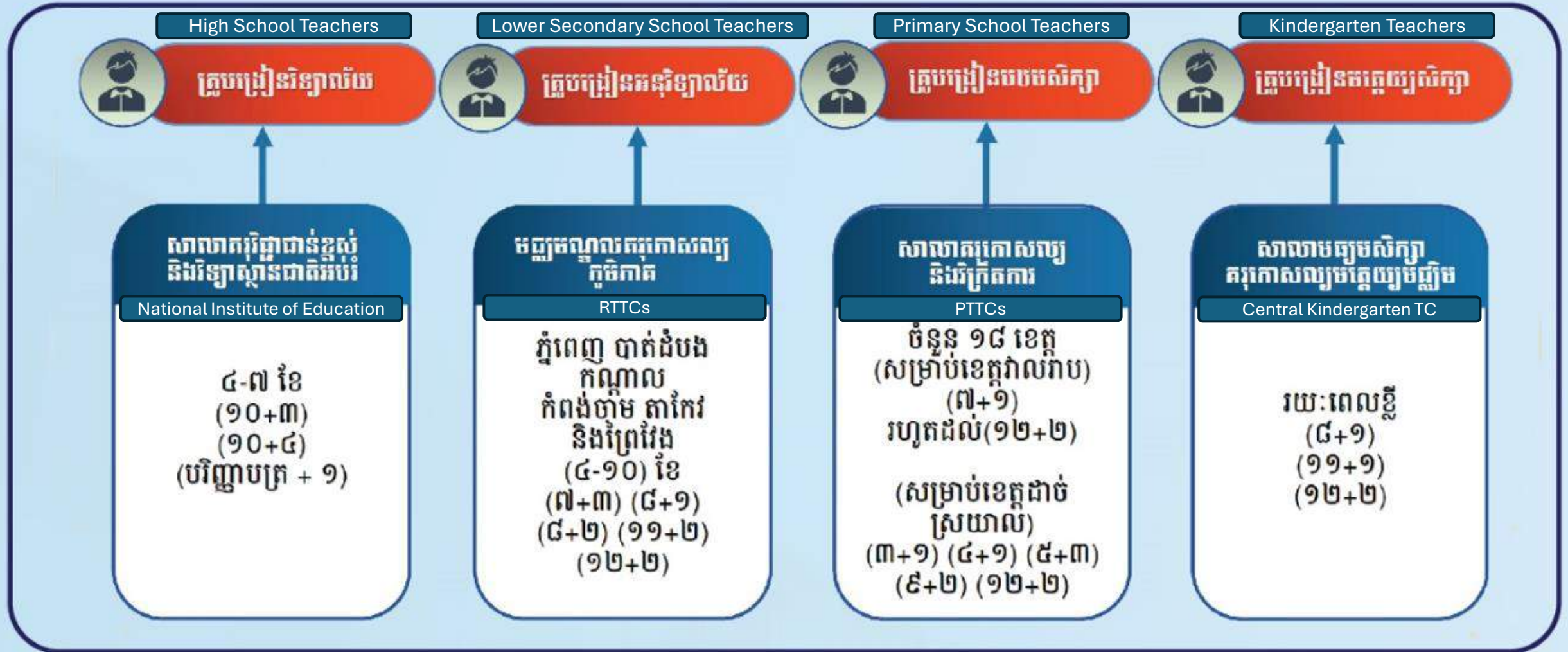


On Education System after the Khmer Rouge



On Teacher Training after the Khmer Rouge

- Strict control on what and how teachers can teach



On diversity in Cambodia

Ethnic Khmer make up 90-94 per cent of the entire population, with the remainder comprised of four distinct groups: Cham, indigenous highland communities, ethnic Chinese and ethnic Vietnamese, plus other smaller minority groups such as the Khmer Krom and the Kuy people. However, the government formally recognizes only Cham and Khmer Loeu – a term that is increasingly used to conflate indigenous peoples with Khmer nationalism. The government does not recognize the international designation of 'indigenous peoples' but refers to such groups as ethnic minorities.

With regard to Cambodia's indigenous peoples, there are between 18 and 24 different indigenous communities, comprising an estimated 400,000 people or 2 – 3 per cent of the country's total population.

On diversity in Cambodia

- Ethnic Diversity
 - Vietnamese 3-7.4%
 - Cham 1-2%
 - Chinese 3-3.2%
 - Indigenous Highland Communities (Khmer Loeu) -- numbering between 18 and 24 distinct communities and making up around 2-3%
 - **Other Minorities:** Smaller groups like the Kui, Mnong, and various Tai-speaking peoples (Lao, Thai) also contribute to the ethnic mosaic
- Religious Diversity





On diversity in Cambodia

- Religious Diversity
 - Theravada Buddhism 97%
 - Islam 2%
 - Christianity 0.2-0.4%
 - Animism and Indigenous Beliefs
 - Historical Hindu Influence
 - Other Religions



On diversity in Cambodia

- **Policy on Inclusive Education**, adopted in 2018
- 5 Pillars
 - **Emphasis on Equity and Access**
 - **Curriculum Adjustments**
 - **Teacher Training and Support**
 - **Community Engagement**
 - **Accessibility and Infrastructure**



Challenges and Opportunities

While the Policy on Inclusive Education presents a positive framework, translating its principles into practice remains a challenge. Limited resources, inadequate infrastructure, and persisting societal stigma towards disability and diversity are some of the hurdles to overcome.

Despite the challenges, Cambodia has witnessed encouraging progress. Increased enrollment rates for children with disabilities, expanded teacher training programs, and pilot projects implementing inclusive practices are promising indicators. Continued commitment from the government, collaboration with stakeholders, and sustained funding will be crucial for achieving the policy's vision.

How Cambodian Teachers Deal with Cultural Diversity

Questions

Responses

2,515

Settings

Section 1 of 4

ភាពជាគ្រូបង្រៀន និងការយល់ដឹងពីភាពទីទៃពីគ្នា នៃសិស្ស និងការប្រើវិធីសាស្ត្របង្រៀន

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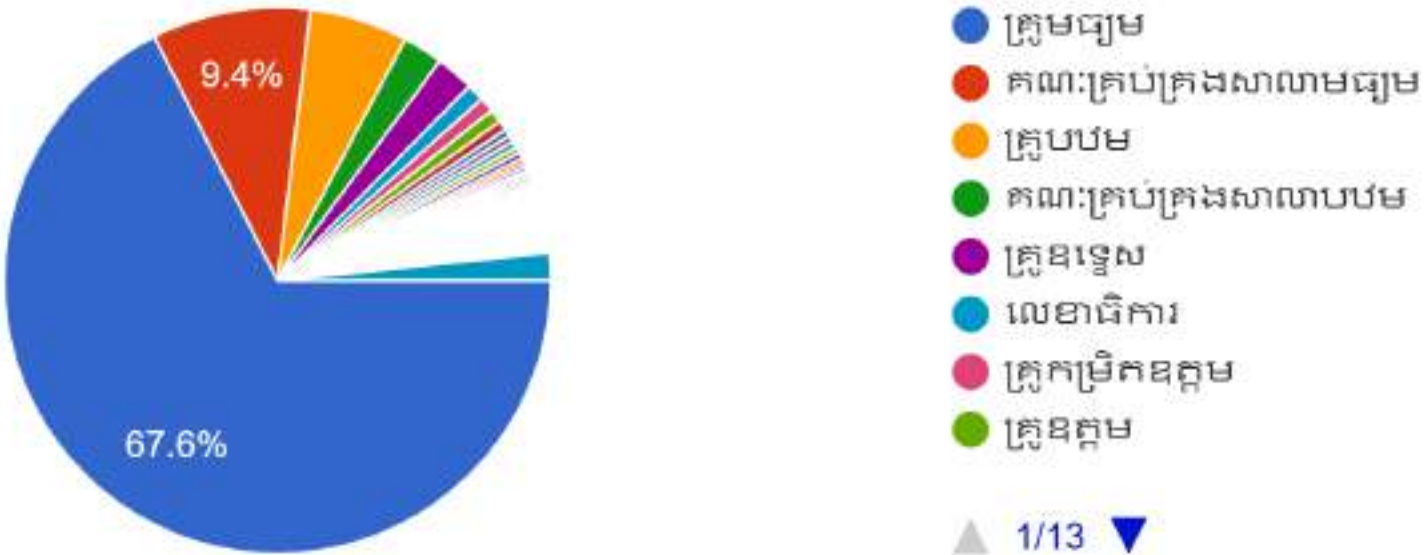
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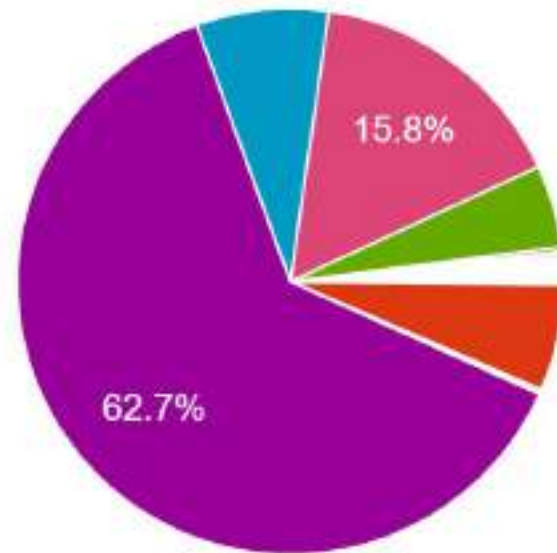
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2,515 responses



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លោក លោកបានសិក្សាវគ្គលើកកម្ពស់គុណវុឌ្ឍិមួយណា?

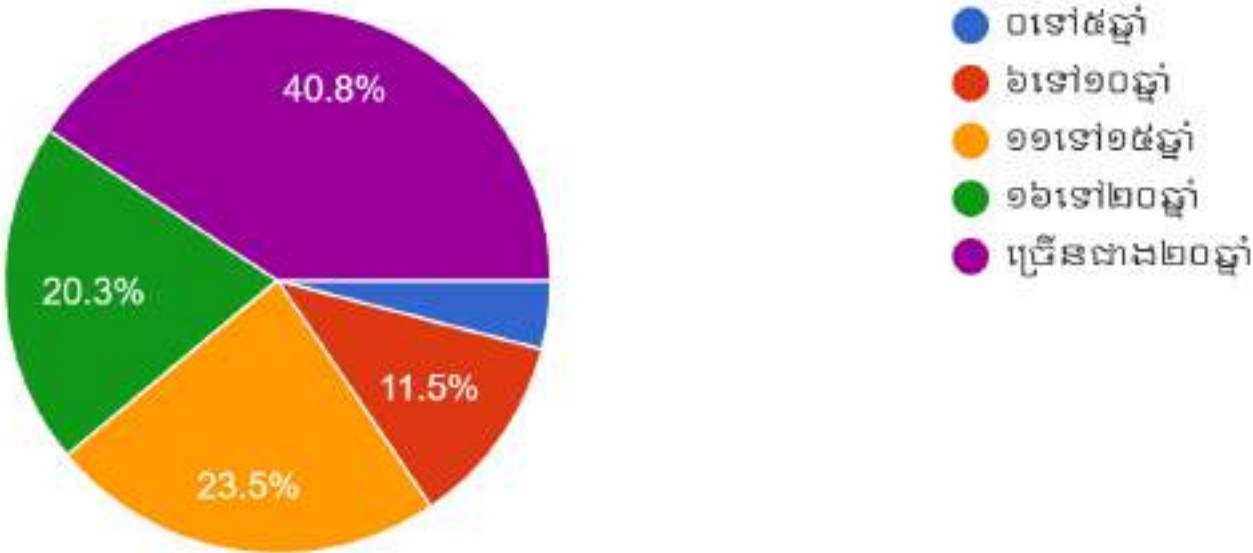
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- ឧក្រិដ្ឋ មកុយ
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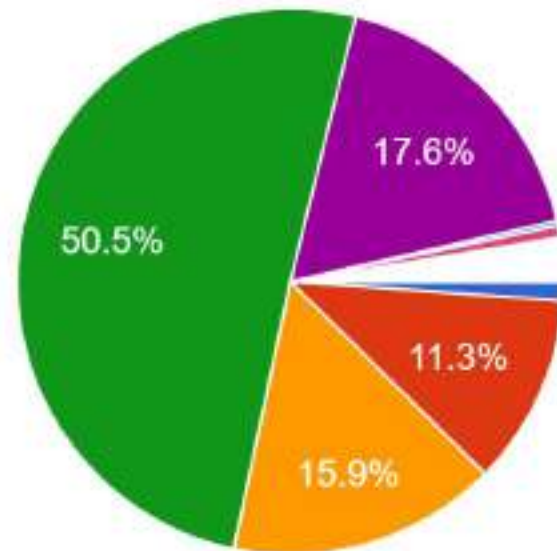
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2,515 responses



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លោក លោកស្រីមានកម្រិតការសិក្សាខ្ពស់បំផុតត្រឹមណាដែរ?

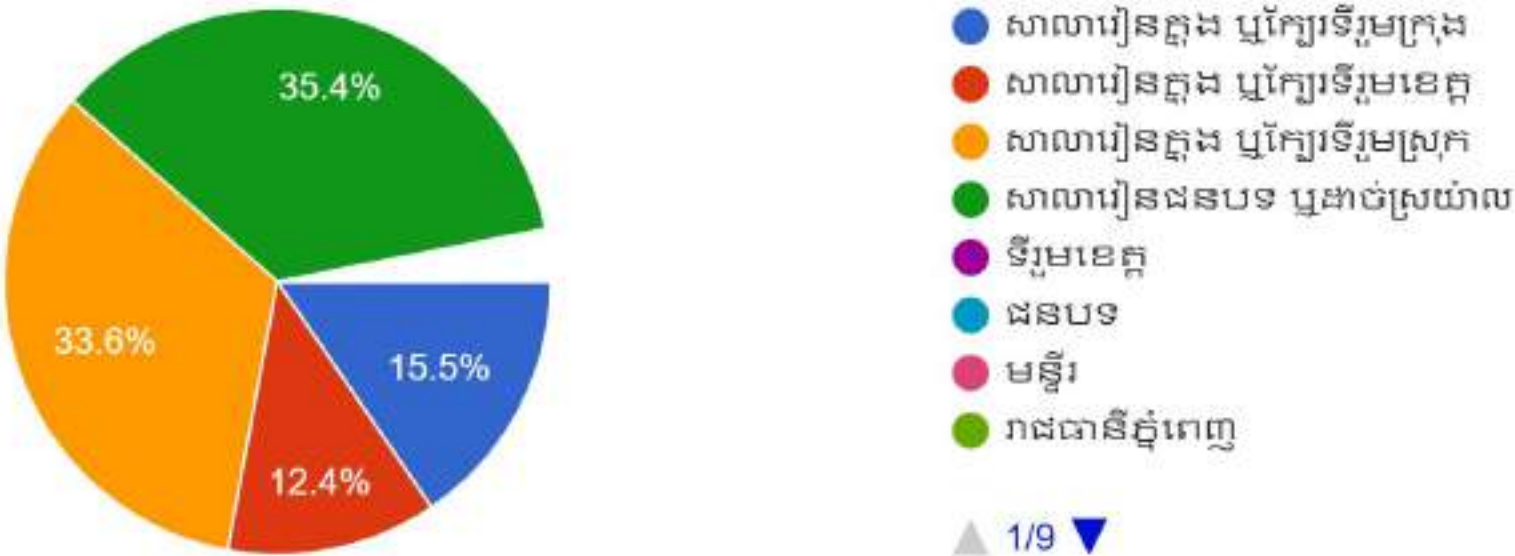
2,515 responses



- ក្រោមបាក់ឌុប
- បាក់ឌុប
- ១២+២
- បរិញ្ញាបត្រ (កំពុងរៀន ក៏បានបញ្ចប់ការ...)
- បរិញ្ញាបត្រជាន់ខ្ពស់ (កំពុងរៀន ក៏បានប...)
- បណ្ឌិត (កំពុងរៀន ក៏បានបញ្ចប់ការសិក្សា)
- បរិញ្ញាបត្រ
- បរិញ្ញាបត្រជាន់ខ្ពស់

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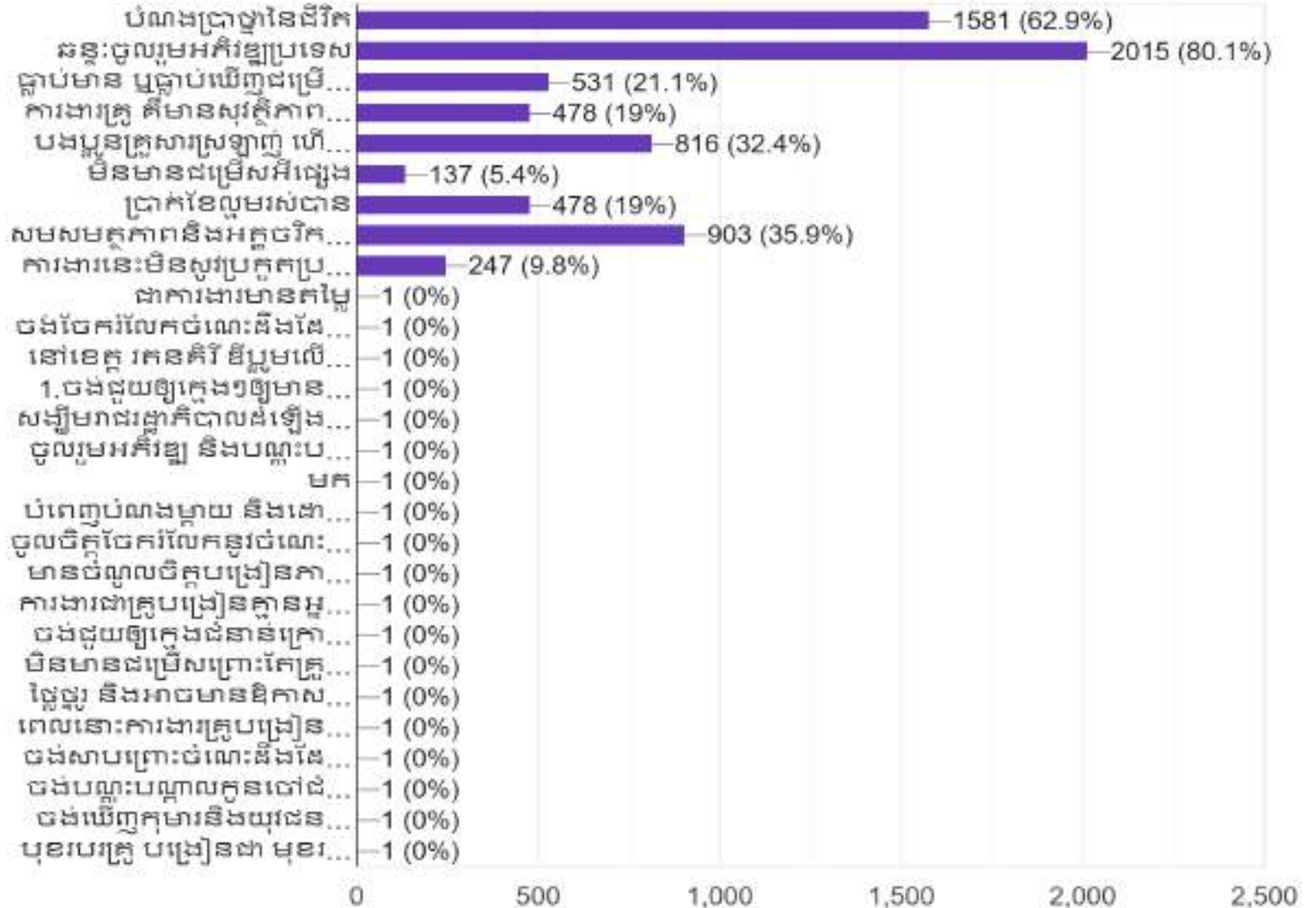
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2,515 responses



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ហេតុអ្វីបានជាលោក លោកស្រី ជ្រើសជាអាជីពគ្រូបង្រៀន ឬជាគណៈគ្រប់គ្រងសាលារៀន?
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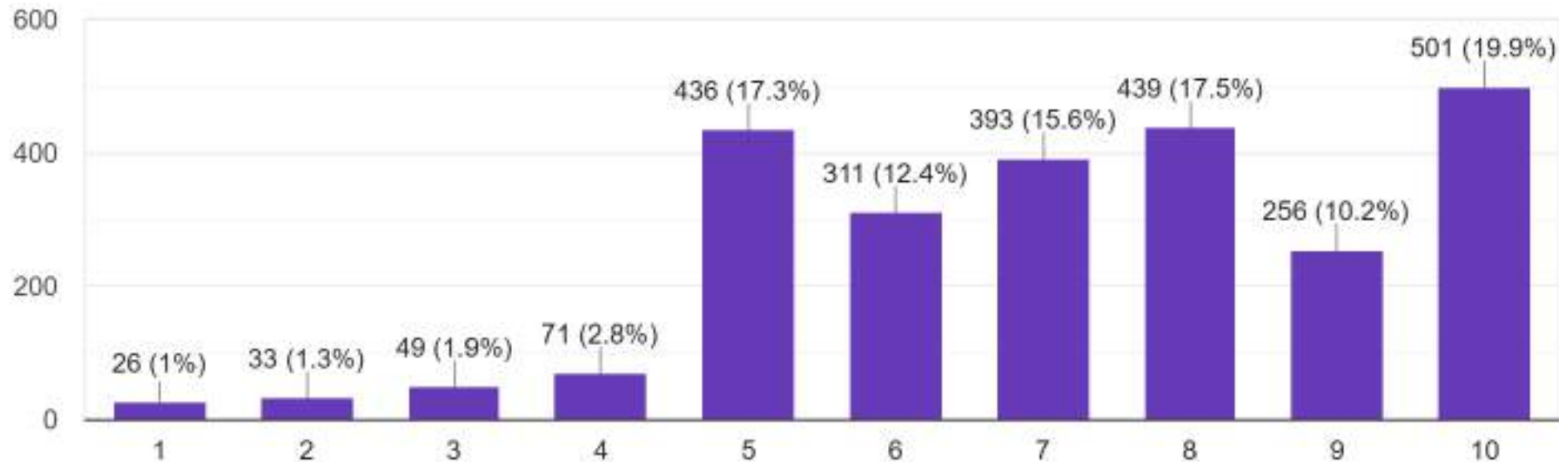
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បច្ចុប្បន្ននេះ តើការងារជាគ្រូ ឬជាអ្នកអប់រំនេះ សង្គមផ្តល់តម្លៃដូចម្តេចដែរ?

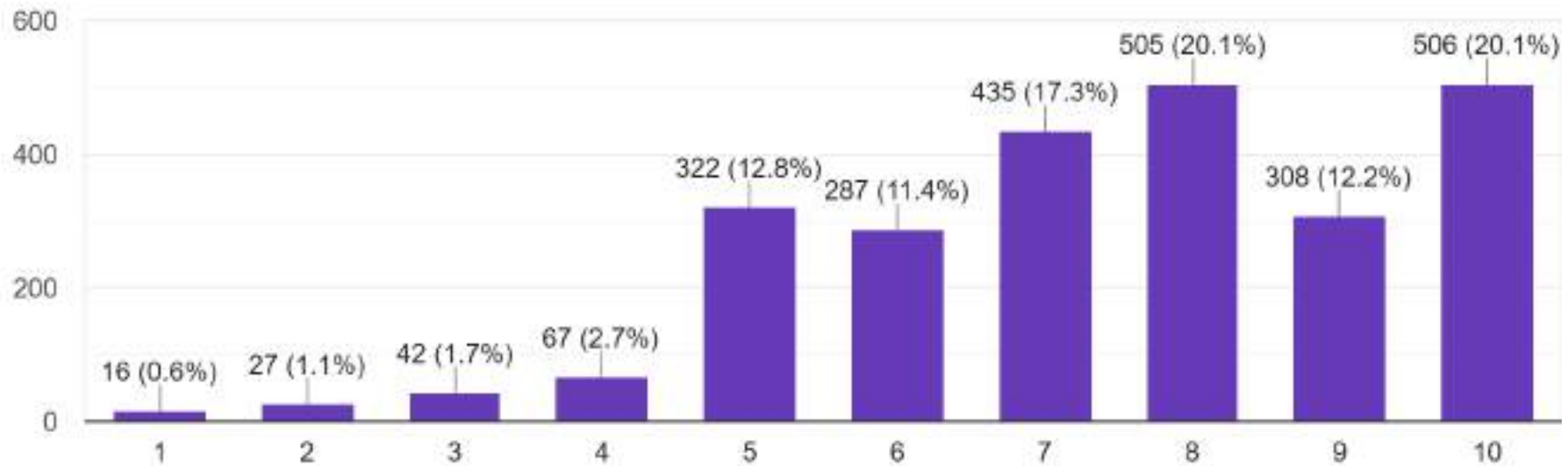
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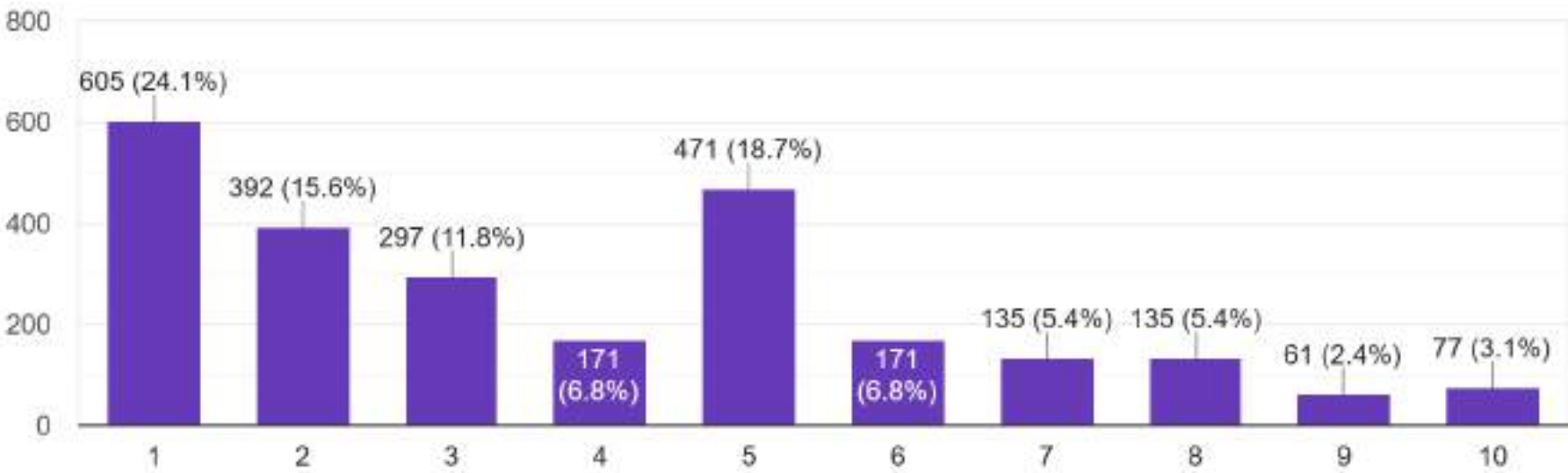
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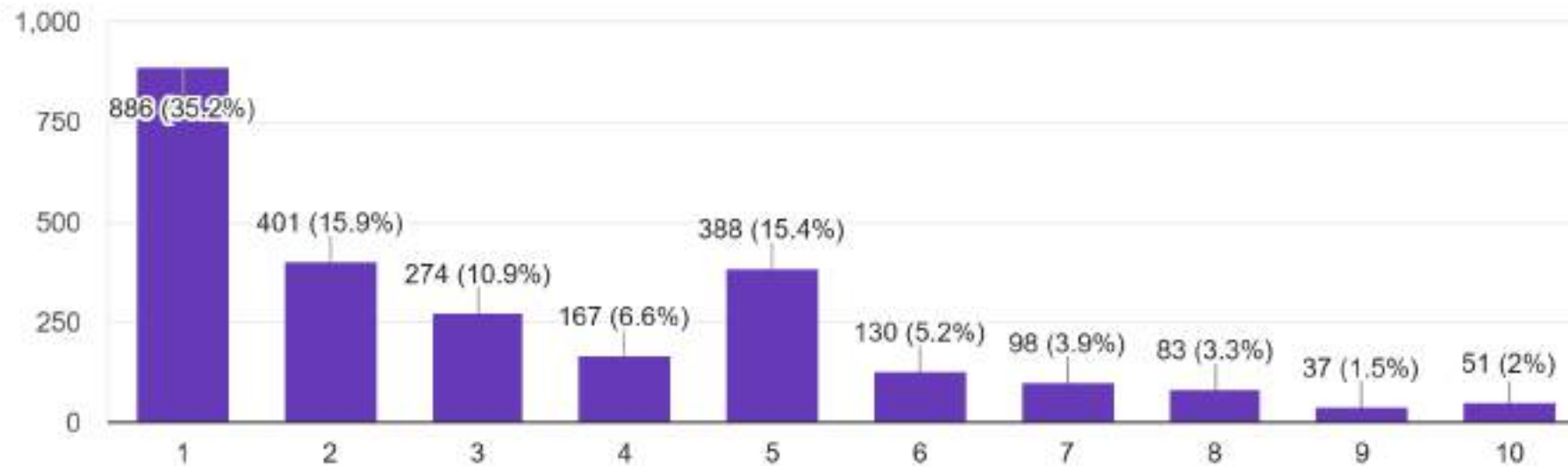
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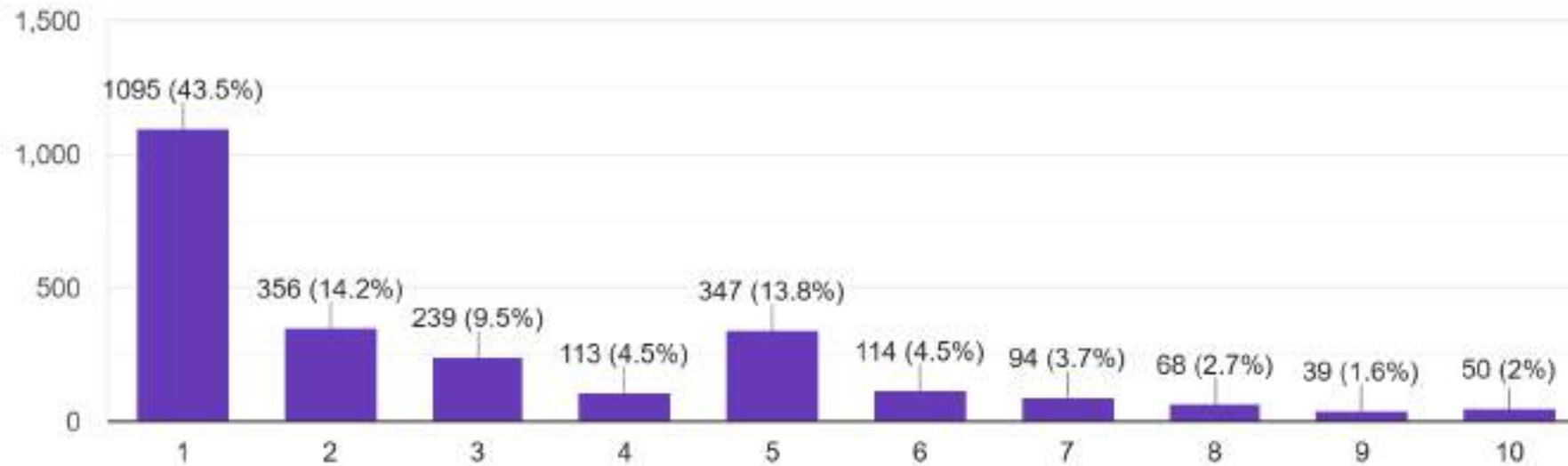
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2,515 responses



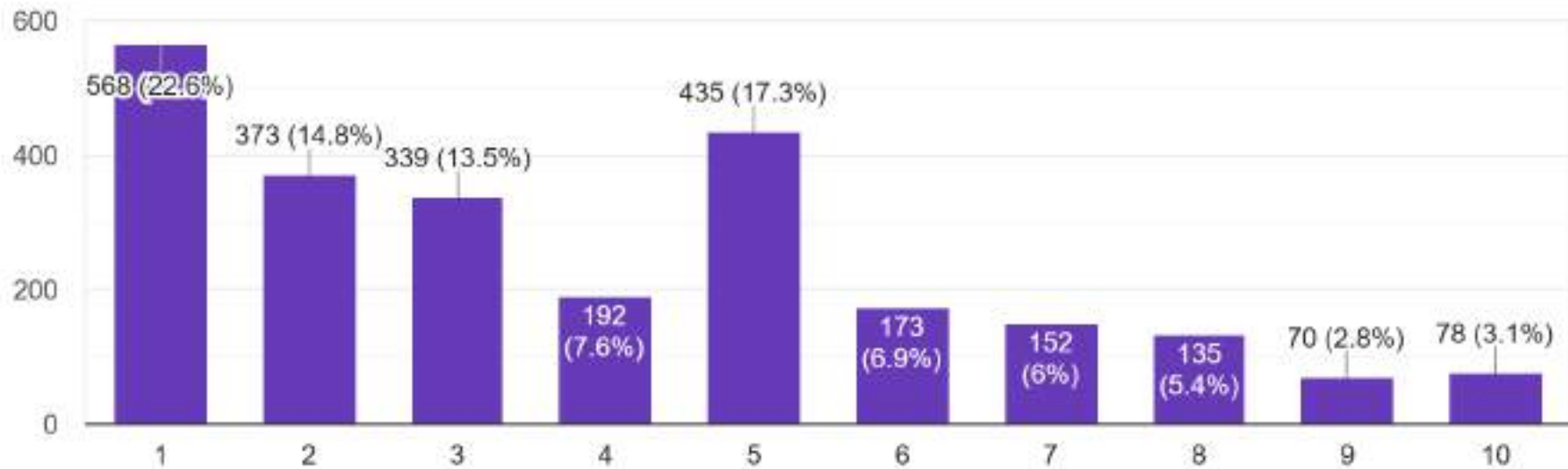
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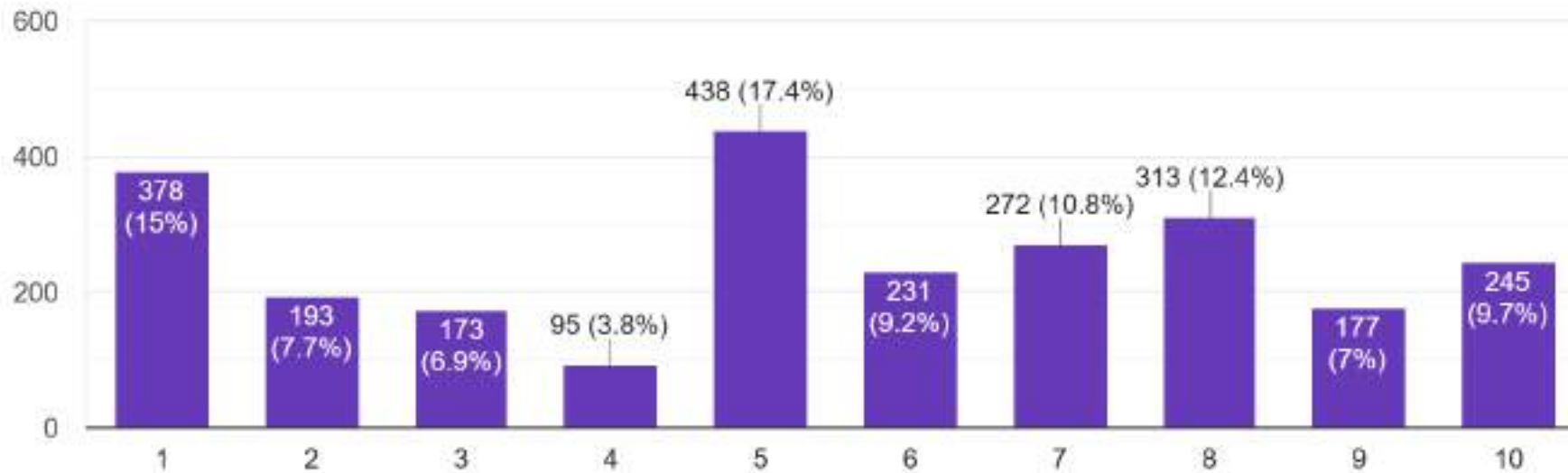
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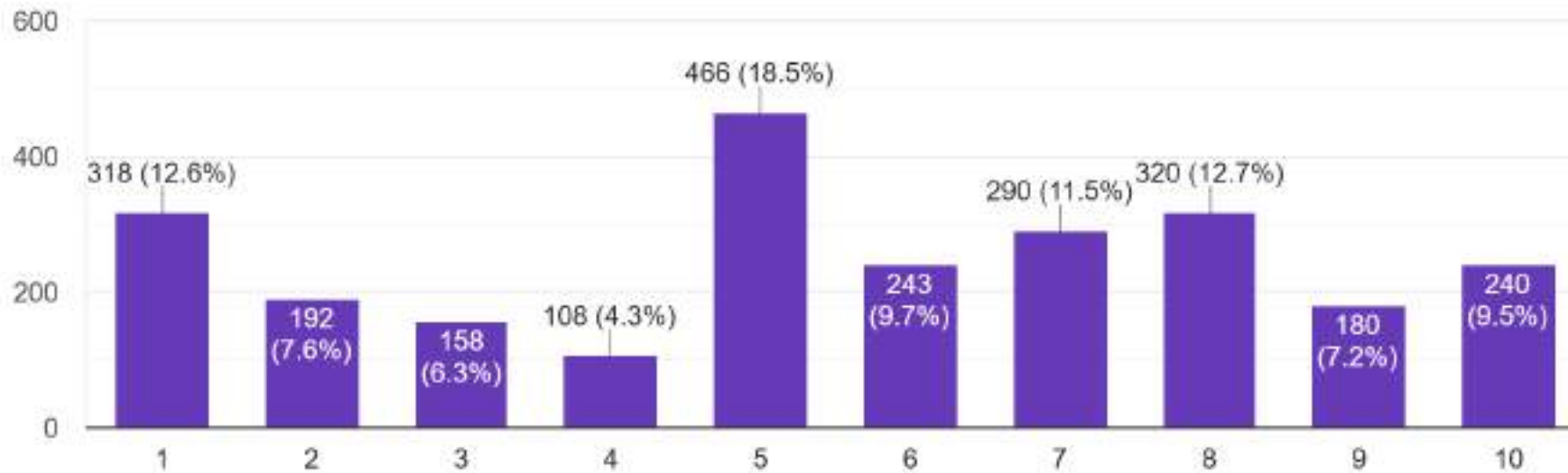
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ពេលត្រៀមមេរៀន ឬពេលបង្រៀន លោក
លោកស្រីគិតដល់ភាពទីតាំងនៃការប្រើប្រាស់ភាសាក៏...លាវៀន ដែលសមស្របឱ្យគេបានយល់ បានរៀនចេះខ្ពស់បំផុត?
2,515 responses



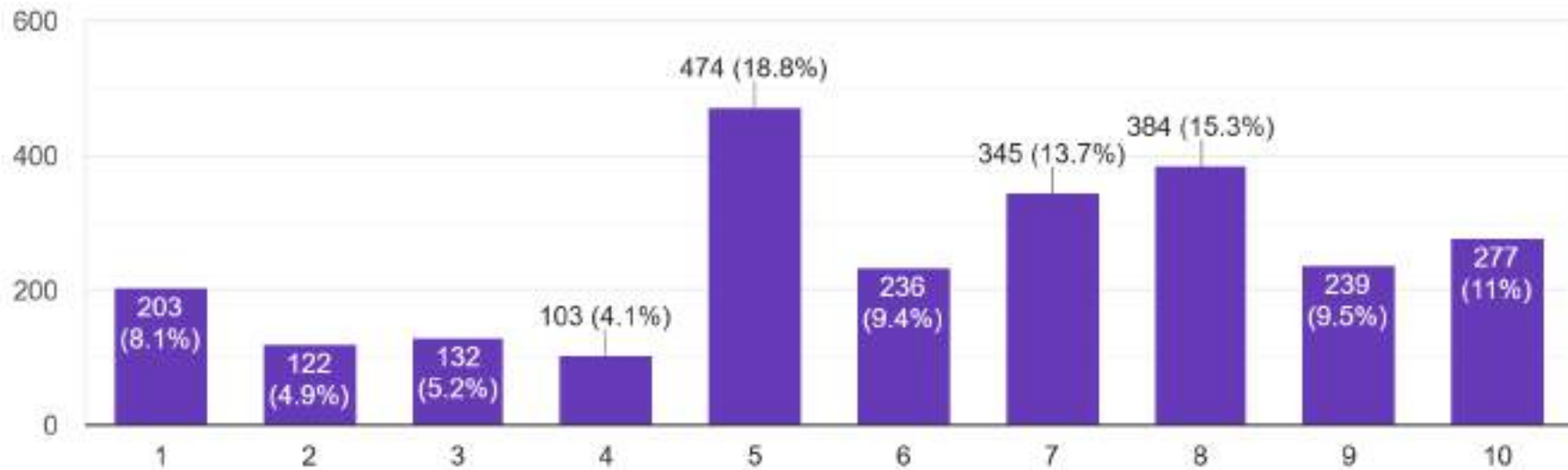
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2,515 responses



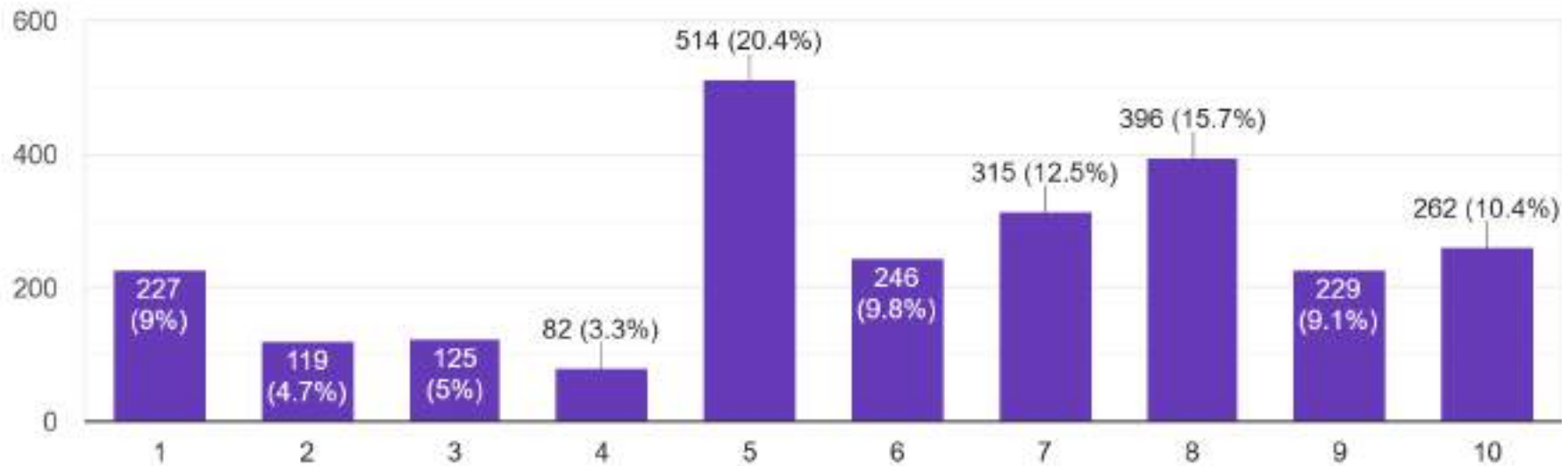
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2,515 responses



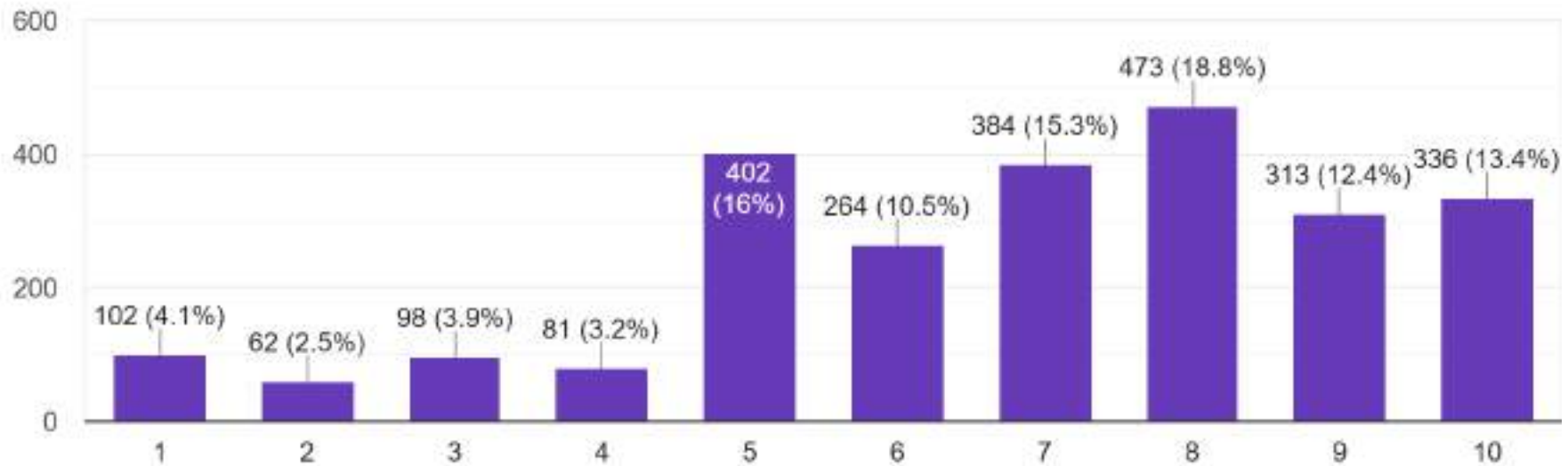
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2,515 responses



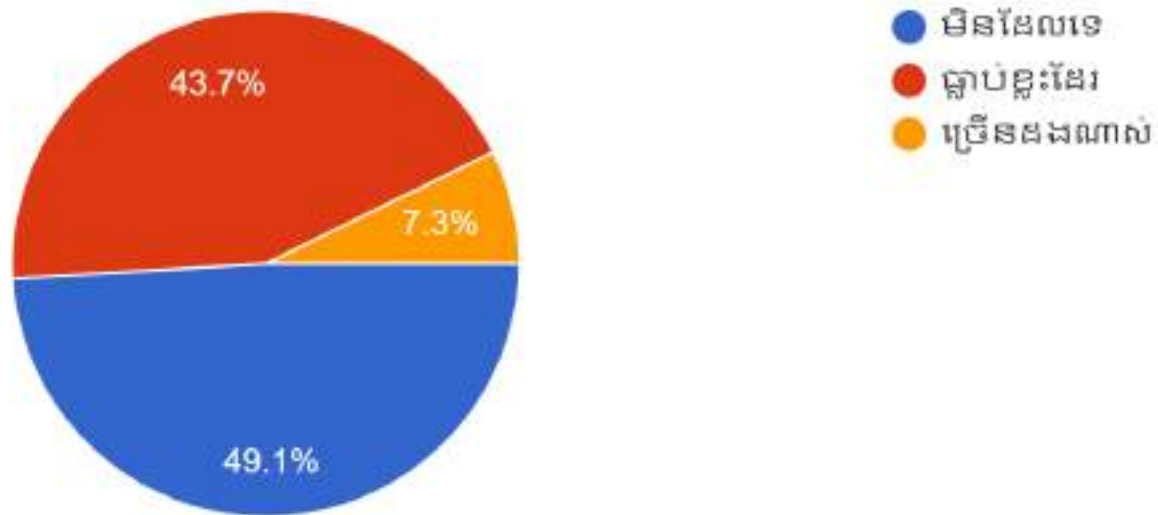
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2,515 responses



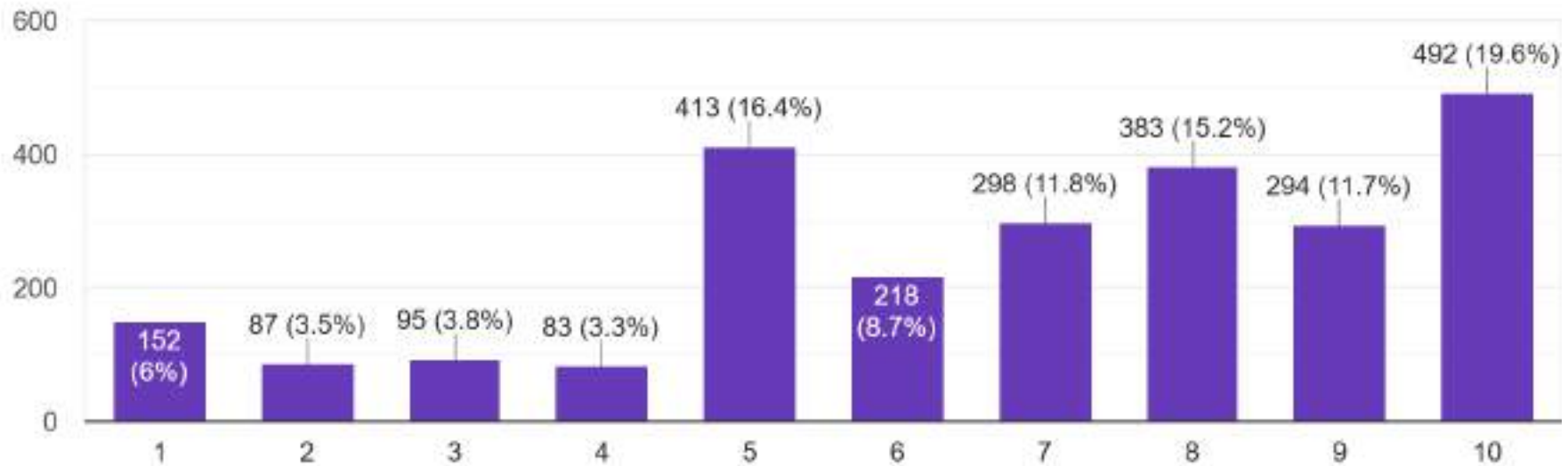
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តើលោក លោកស្រីដែលបានទទួលការបណ្តុះបណ្តាលឱ្យយកចិត្តទុកដាក់ដល់ភាពទី១ទី២
ឬភាពចម្រុះវប្បធម៌របស់សិស្ស ក្នុងការបង្រៀន ឬការគ្រប់គ្រងសាលាទេ?
2,515 responses



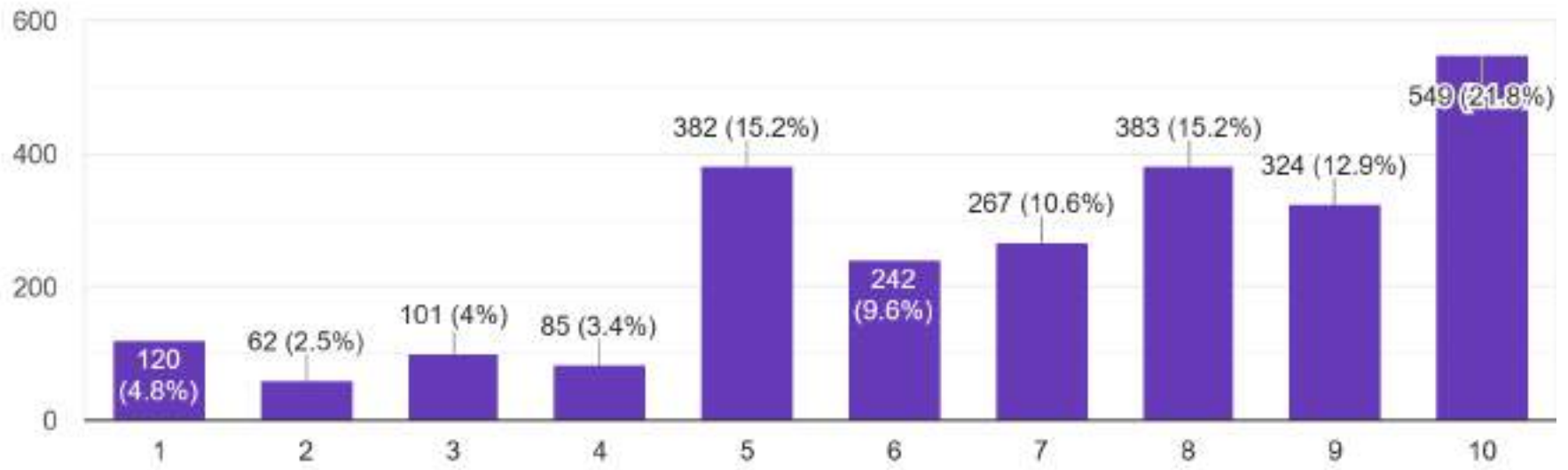
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2,515 responses



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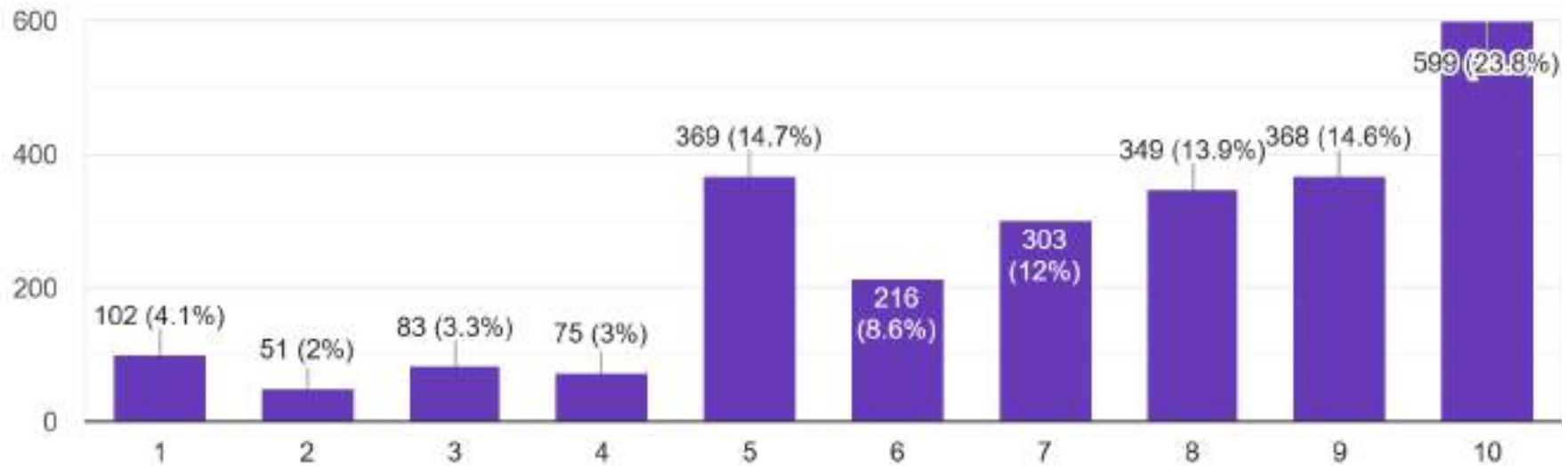
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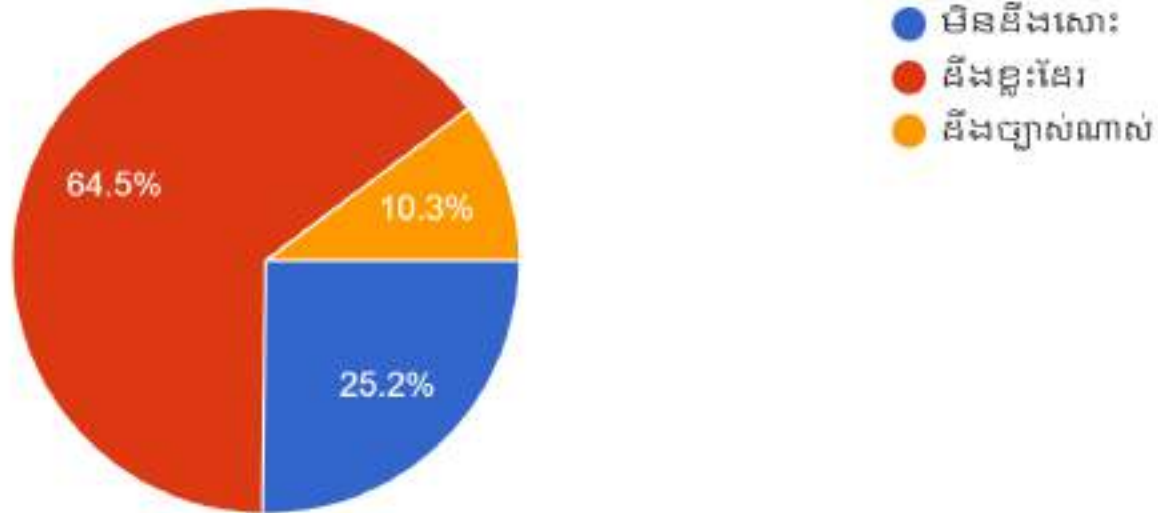
តើលោក លោកស្រីយល់ថាមន្ទីរ ឬក្រសួង គួរយកចិត្តទុកដាក់ដល់ភាពទីទៃពីគ្នា ឬភាពចម្រុះវប្បធម៌របស់សិស្សដល់កម្រិតណាដែរ?

2,515 responses



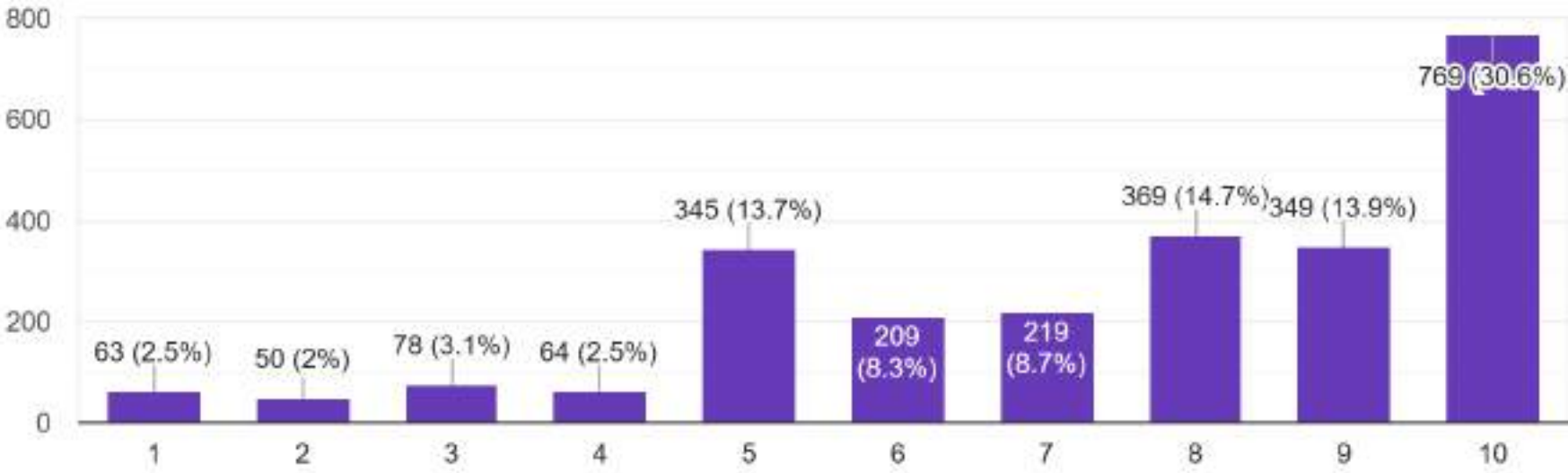
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2,515 responses



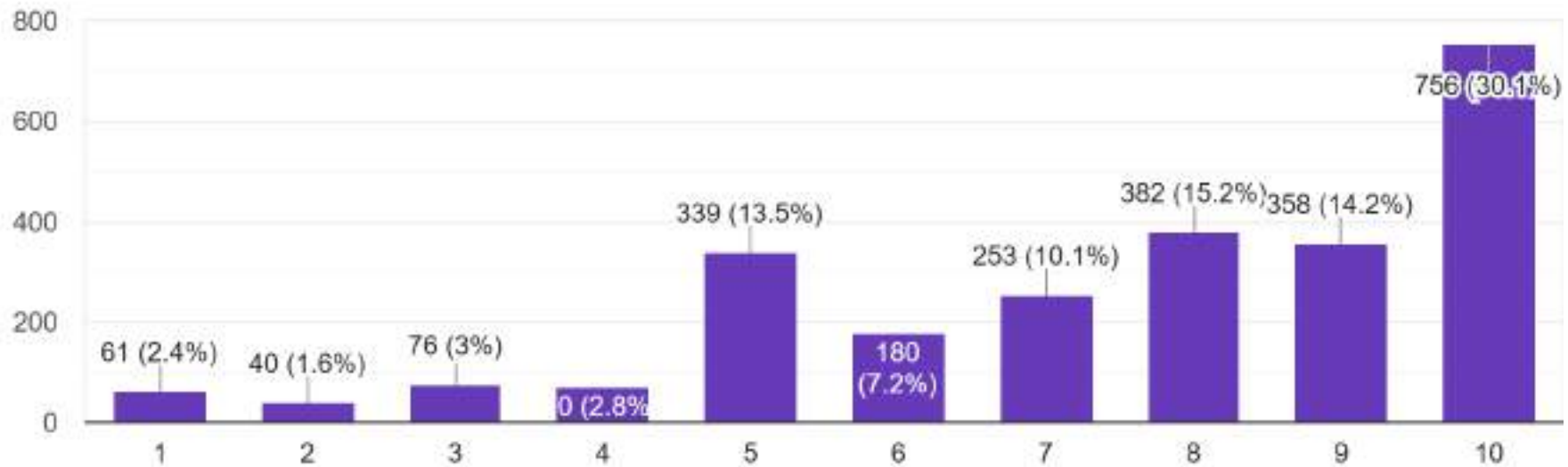
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ចង់ឱ្យមានការបណ្តុះបណ្តាលគ្រូបង្រៀនទាក់ទងនឹងវិធីសាស្ត្រ...មានភាពទីតាំង ឬភាពចម្រុះវប្បធម៌ ដល់កម្រិតណាដែរ?
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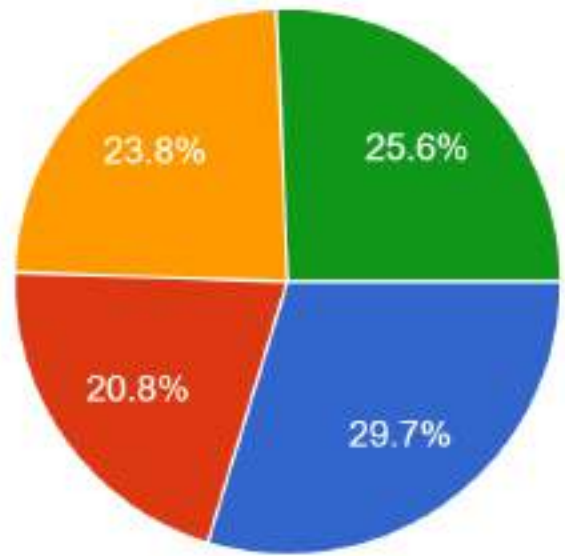
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2,515 responses



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2,515 responses



- គួរផ្ដោតលើភាពជាខ្មែរជាង
- គួរផ្ដោតលើភាពចម្រុះវប្បធម៌ខ្លះ
- គួរផ្ដោតលើភាពចម្រុះវប្បធម៌ឱ្យបានសមល្មម
- គួរផ្ដោតលើភាពចម្រុះវប្បធម៌ឱ្យបានច្រើន

A Case Study in a High School on Diversity

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=486GopEx8XA>



Any questions?