

# CULTIVATING BIBLICAL LEARNING COMMUNITY IN A VIRTUAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT THROUGH GROUP PROJECT-BASED LEARNING

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## Abstract

For the last two years, the Covid-19 pandemic has caused students to learn in a virtual mode, cultivating a learning community that fully supports students is therefore particularly challenging. Studies have proved that in a virtual learning environment there is a greater possibility of learning loss including loss of interaction and relationship values. From a Biblical perspective, relationship in the learning community needs to be built, repaired, and maintained to make learning fruitful, constructive, and meaningful to students. This study focuses on the experiences of how the biblical learning community is cultivated through an iterative process in group project-based learning. This study uses a qualitative descriptive method on cohort-2020 primary student-teachers at Teachers College, Pelita Harapan University. The data was obtained from observation, performance rubric, and questionnaire. Results from the performance rubric showed that around 65-66% of total students have consideration for the feelings and learning needs of other members in his/her group and encourage others to contribute, and 73-74% of total students show solid cooperation in the group. In addition, data from observation and questionnaires indicated that few students still need time to develop those abovementioned aspects.

**Keywords:** Biblical learning community; online learning; Christian teacher; iterative process; group project-based learning.

### **Abstrak**

Pandemi Covid-19 yang terjadi selama dua tahun terakhir telah menyebabkan siswa belajar dalam mode virtual, sehingga menumbuhkan sebuah komunitas belajar adalah hal yang menantang. Penelitian-penelitian telah membuktikan bahwa di dalam sebuah lingkungan pembelajaran virtual, terdapat kemungkinan yang lebih besar untuk terjadinya kehilangan pembelajaran, termasuk kehilangan pembelajaran tentang dan melalui nilai-nilai interaksi dan hubungan. Dari perspektif Alkitabiah, hubungan di dalam komunitas belajar perlu dibangun, diperbaiki, dan dipelihara untuk membuat pembelajaran berbuah, konstruktif, dan bermakna bagi para siswa. Penelitian ini berfokus pada pengalaman tentang bagaimana komunitas belajar yang alkitabiah dikultivasi melalui sebuah proses berulang dalam pembelajaran berbasis proyek grup. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif deskriptif pada mahasiswa-guru angkatan 2020 di Teachers College, Universitas Pelita Harapan. Data diperoleh dari observasi, rubrik performa, dan kuesioner. Hasil dari rubrik performa menunjukkan bahwa sekitar 65-66% dari keseluruhan siswa memiliki perhatian untuk perasaan dan kebutuhan belajar terhadap anggota lain dalam grupnya, juga mendorong siswa-siswa lain untuk berkontribusi dan 73-74% dari keseluruhan siswa menunjukkan kerja sama yang solid dalam grup. Selain itu, data dari observasi dan kuesioner mengindikasikan bahwa beberapa siswa masih membutuhkan waktu untuk mengembangkan aspek-aspek yang disebutkan di atas.

**Kata kunci:** Komunitas pembelajaran Alkitabiah; pembelajaran online; guru Kristen; proses berulang; pembelajaran berbasis proyek kelompok.

## **Introduction**

The world was created exquisitely, in which there is a shalom relationship between God and humans, among human beings, and between humans and other creations. As God spoke, all things entered a relationship with each other and were given a purpose (Graham, 2003). When God created man in the Garden of Eden, God gave man a cultural mandate to cultivate and manage creation. This is where education begins when humans with God-given talents begin to manage creation in the Garden of Eden. In carrying out cultural mandates, humans interact and relate to God, other human beings, and other creatures. The interaction that produces this relationship is referred to as a building community or what is known as a learning community. Therefore, the ideal picture of a true learning community is when there is a peaceful relationship between God and humans, among human beings, and between humans and other creations. This is called as shalom community.

The condition of the shalom community that God created did not last long due to the fall of man into sin. Sin results in the destruction of human relationships with God, other humans, and creations. Van Brummelen (2011) said that there is no perfect class due to disturbing sins. In other words, there has been no perfect learning community since the fall of man. However, God's story did not stop at the fall of man into sin. The atonement of Jesus Christ overcomes sin and enables humans to seek the presence of the shalom community. Humans who believe in Christ's redemptive work need to be actively involved in building relationships with God, other human beings, and creations that have been damaged. This cannot be separated from human identity as the image and likeness of God who was created to have a nature to relate with others. God created us to be in a relationship with Him and with others (Graham, 2003). God created humans to live in a relationship because the Trinity of God is also related to one another. As long as living in the world, humans continue to learn to be more like God by building relationships to create a shalom community.

School or class is a place for students to build a community that involves relationships. The classroom itself reflects such a community because students and teachers form a community of learners (Vryhof,

2011). Classes consist of unique and diverse teachers and students. No student is the same in a class because of students' environment and development influenced by family backgrounds, cultures, learning styles, genders, socioeconomics, and different learning needs. The diversity of individuals in the class becomes a challenge in building relationships, but at the same time, it can be an opportunity to grow holistically. Christian educators are given the privilege of using authority in the classroom to create a biblical learning community in a classroom full of diversity in all contexts.

In this era, the world is changing rapidly, and the condition of the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the context. The COVID-19 pandemic over 2 years has changed the learning system. Learning that used to take place face-to-face has turned into virtual learning with the help of technology. Learning becomes a challenge because most teachers and students were still limited in understanding the technology and virtual-based learning methods, as well as the limited facilities and infrastructure. In addition, there is no physical contact that occurs between teachers and students, and among students in virtual learning. This is similar to research which says that the obstacles that occur during virtual learning are the lack of interaction between teachers and students, many areas are limited in internet coverage, and the lack of mastery of computer language and ICT skills from both students and teachers (Rusli, Hermawan, and Supuwingsih, 2020). This ultimately has an impact on inadequate learning quality such as lack of learning interaction in the classroom, lack of involvement of students, and lack of understanding of what is being learned. In this situation, pursuing a biblical learning community is more challenging for Christian educators to do.

The gap observed during virtual learning makes Christian educators look for strategies to continue to cultivate a biblical learning community. One of the appropriate learning strategies to develop a biblical learning community is collaborative learning. It is considered appropriate because in collaborative learning there are interactions that occur among students, between students and teachers, even between students and the knowledge. Collaborative learning correlates positively with student engagement, attitudes, persistence, and personal

development (Cross, Barkley, and Major, 2014). Group project-based learning is one of the collaborative learning strategies. Cooper and Murphy (2016), said that project-based learning is learning that requires communication and collaboration between individuals in the classroom, so building relationships is important in this strategy.

The problem raised in this study is how do Christian educators work in biblical learning communities in virtual learning environments through group project-based learning? This study focuses on the experiences of how the biblical learning community is cultivated through an iterative process in group project-based learning. The author observed the biblical learning community through human interaction that exists between teachers and students, and among students.

### **Biblical Learning Community**

A learning community is an association that has the same learning goals, and each member participates in each other to achieve these learning goals (Sekar & Kamarubiani, 2020). Deeper than that, the Bible clearly states that God calls us to be a community where we all contribute according to our individual talents (Van Brummelen, 2011). The learning community needs to be considered by Christian educators because the learning community “shifts individual learning into social learning” (Tantomas, 2021).

Graham (2003) said that human beings were made in the image of God, so humans are called God's image bearer. In His triune, God has a relational nature. Consequently, humans are also relational. Moes and Tellinghuisen (2014), also said that we cannot be understood apart from our relationships. Humans are created in the likeness of God including in the personal character of God, therefore humans can have relationships that involve, know, love, and communicate with one another (Poythress, 2011). Also, our educational process must be designed to foster the development of this shared experience or fellowship (Graham, 2003). The learning community fulfills the needs of human nature as beings who are related and need relationships.

According to Vryhof (2011), a genuine biblical community is inclusive. It is a place of safety and nurture where uniqueness is celebrated, not ridiculed, and conflict is resolved without physical or emotional violence. Graham (2003), said that there are three elements in a biblical learning community, namely: love, merciful, and dependent. As humans, we already receive the mercy that we do not deserve, and we are dependent not only on God but also on our fellow human beings. People in the community are allowed to be weak, to doubt, and to risk and fail without rejection. Such acceptance requires humility and vulnerability uncommon in society but very much present in the Body of Christ.

Since the fall into sin, there's no such a perfect community (Van Brummelen, 2011). Each community shows some faults, some scars, and some weaknesses. Communities may disregard the ways of the Lord and do things that do not honor Him. Even healthy communities or communities that seek to love and serve the Lord are affected by sin and may experience the consequences of evil, pain, and suffering. Communities may become dysfunctional, corrupt, exploitative, divisive, self-centered, and power-hungry (Dickens, K. et al., 2017).

At schools, students are encouraged to look for ways, in response to God's love, to bring hope, reconciliation, love, and justice in their communities as well as in all the other communities to which they belong. A community that reflects the love of God will practice the values and virtues that foster effective community life like honesty, integrity, care, compassion, kindness, gentleness, patience, and service to others (Dickens, K. et al., 2017). Van Brummelen (2011), noted that in the biblical learning community each member contributes according to their respective talents, accept, and use abilities related to self and others, work and pray together, respect others when working on collaborative learning assignments, get to know and accept friends, realize the strengths and special needs of friends in groups or classes. Christian school people cultivate biblical community through open communication, understanding, and acceptance (Vryhof, 2011).

## **Virtual Learning Environment**

According to Pannen (1999) in Julaeha (2013), virtual learning is "the learning process that occurs in virtual classrooms that are in cyberspace through the internet network". Another definition also states virtual learning is "a learning system using a learning platform" (Santosa et al., 2021). Two main principles in a virtual learning environment are authority and collaboration. Authority means that students have the responsibility to choose their materials, access to learning, and their learning path. Collaborative means to be able to exercise this authority, students still have to communicate and interact with teachers or other students (Julaeha, 2013). Online learning implies that teachers give students more assignments to do than interact directly to discuss something (Santosa et al., 2021). The process of interaction between teachers and students is becoming less and less because in online learning, students and teachers have the freedom to access learning anytime and anywhere.

Some characteristics of virtual learning are as below: each learning activity is accessed individually by teachers and students in a virtual space, lack of interaction between teachers and students, many areas have limited internet coverage or difficulties in accessing the internet, also lack mastery of computer language and ICT skills both from students or teachers (Rusli et al., 2020). Referring to its name, the main feature of virtual learning is that it utilizes electronic and digital technology services (Codemi, 2019).

Moore (1989) in Keaton & Gilbert (2020), said that there are three types of interaction in distance education, such as learner-content, learner-instructor, and learner-learner. Learner-content interaction is when students have internal discussions about the information they encounter in the course or elsewhere. The characteristics that Moore included in the learner-instructor relationship, such as building caring relationships, understanding student backgrounds, and facilitating content interaction. The last type of interaction described by Moore is learner-learner interaction. This is essential for learning and is an important skill for students' future involvement in society (Moore, 1989), and while it is difficult in online education, it is important to incorporate.

## **Group Project-based Learning**

Project-based learning (PjBL) is a social practice in which students are socialized through a series of group activities involving the simultaneous learning of language, content, and skills (Mali, 2016). It can be said that PjBL is a learning model that implements a scientific approach by focusing on core concepts and principles, facilitating students to analyze problem-solving ideas, and other meaningful tasks, being student oriented, and producing real products" (Silitonga, 2020; Winangun, 2021). That way, PjBL becomes a learning method that provides direct experience through sensing that builds meaning about something during project work (Silitonga, 2020).

There are 3 reasons of PjBL used as an effective method of learning according to (Fester, J., & Starkey, 2022), namely: 1) PjBL could link or collaborate with other different subjects (interdisciplinary/transdisciplinary learning) so it can reduce the load of learning and assessment planning; 2) Learning becomes more transparent and responsive for students. Students could see direct progress from learning and knowledge they own obtained during project-based learning. Learning will be more active and not boring; students do more explorations and find the connection; 3) PjBL strengthens class culture and function. There is no more teacher-centered learning, all students will collaboratively work when every instruction and regulation is already understood at the beginning. Project-Based Learning certainly provides space for collaborative work because to produce a work or project requires collaboration with several other individuals. Thus, as mentioned by (Sunismi et al., 2022), PjBL provides space for students to work together, and learn collaboratively to produce a joint project.

In the application of Project-Based Learning, in general, there are 6 stages or activities within the class (Boss, Suzie. & Krauss, 2014). First, the teacher starts with big and essential questions that are challenging and relevant to the realities of students' lives to stimulate students to think critically about real problems and their solutions. Second, the teacher makes a project plan. Third, the teacher makes a schedule. The teacher determines the schedule for each project's progress from the



students to provide quality and useful feedback for the continuation of the project and the timeline of each project stage. Next, the fourth, the teacher monitors student work and projects being worked on, the discussion process, and student collaboration in groups. Fifth, the teacher assesses the results of the project stages so that the assessment process does not take up more time and this assessment can be an evaluation to improve student projects. Sixth, lastly, the implementation of evaluation and reflection so that teachers and students reflect on the process during project work and the impact that can be given through learning and the project.

PjBL is learning that requires communication and collaboration between individuals in the classroom, so building relationships with one another can be one of the factors that support PjBL to run more effectively (Cooper & Murphy, 2016). With the establishment of good relations between members in the class, the discussion process and project work will run more smoothly and effectively. Building a class culture or class habits to collaborate can also support PjBL learning because PjBL requires a lot of collaborative activities to produce a project. Another factor that affects the implementation of PjBL is when teachers must always connect learning content with the realities of students' lives so that the objectives of the projects made can also be seen clearly. Furthermore, throughout the PjBL learning process, teachers must also be ready to provide quality feedback on each student's progress or project stage.

## **Research Method**

This study uses a descriptive qualitative research method. The research took place for one semester in the Science for Lower Grade Elementary School and PSAL Mathematics courses. The subjects in this study were cohort 2020 students of the Primary Education study program who taught both courses. The purpose of this descriptive qualitative research is to provide a factual and systematic description of the phenomena that occur during lectures related to the variable of the biblical learning community through project-based learning groups in virtual learning.

In the PSAL Primary School Mathematics course, the learning community begins through the process of unit mapping in groups. Each group member will also evaluate the work of other members in making lesson plans, learning media, and microteaching. The group evaluation is very useful and even decisive in revising student work in making lesson plans, learning media, and microteaching for the second phase as the end of semester exam (UAS). In the Science for Lower Grade Elementary course, students work in groups to make 2 projects, namely Science Worksheet and Online Games Design. Each student has a role to contribute to completing the projects. Each group will report the progress of the project made in class then lecturers and other groups will provide feedback in the form of comments, compliments, and suggestions to improve the quality of the projects.

The technique of collecting data in this research is by observing and evaluating self and colleagues. The research instruments are observation notes, assessment rubrics for evaluation, and questionnaires. The observation is conducted by the lecturer as the main researcher during the learning process with a total of 16 meetings, to obtain qualitative data related to biblical learning community indicators between lecturers and students. Self and peer evaluation using rubrics is carried out by students in groups to obtain quantitative data about the biblical learning community among students. The results of the open questionnaire were used to sharpen the analysis of the biblical learning community between lecturers and students as well as among students.

The following is a table explaining the indicators of a biblical learning community and research instruments used to observe the research variables.

**Tabel 1. Indicator and Research Instrument of Biblical Learning Community**

<b>Indicator Biblical Learning Community</b>	<b>Research Instrument</b>
Teacher creates a space where students felt cared for and connected	Lecturer observation

<b>Teacher-Student Interaction</b>	Teacher engages students in dialogue about their interests and needs, listens attentively, and expresses empathy Teacher creates a sense of trust and respect	notes, questionnaire
<b>Student-Student Interaction</b>	Students have consideration for the feelings and learning needs of other members in his/her group, and also encourage others to contribute Students show solid cooperation in the group	Assessment rubric, questionnaire, lecturer observation notes

The collected data were analyzed quantitatively and described qualitatively in descriptive form. Quantitative data analysis was carried out by calculating the percentage of the number of students who had met the biblical learning community indicators. Qualitative data analysis was carried out with the stages of data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion.

### **Result of Learning Community (Student-to-Student Interaction)**

During 1 (one) semester, 16 meetings were held in 2 (two) subjects, Science for Lower Primary and PSAL Primary Mathematics with the following results:

**Tabel 2. Peer Assessment - Learning Community**

No	Criteria	PSAL Primary School Mathematics		Science for Lower Grade	
		Fulfilled (scale 3-4)	Un-fulfilled (scale 1-2)	Fulfilled (scale 3-4)	Un-fulfilled (scale 1-2)
1	Students have consideration for the feelings and learning needs of other members in his/her group, and also encourage others to contribute	65%	35%	66%	34%

2	Students show solid cooperation in the group	73%	27%	74%	26%
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Table 2 shows that more than half of the students have had consideration for the feelings and learning needs of other members in his/her group, encourage others to contribute, and show solid cooperation in the group because other students in the group feel cared for and appreciated. Still, there is a small number of students who still need to improve collaboration skills and understand and care for each other's needs in the classroom.

### **Result of the Learning Community (Lecturer-Student Interaction and Student-to-Student Interaction)**

In the Science for Lower Primary and PSAL Primary School Mathematics course, the obtained result from the questionnaire is that all students pay attention to other students and ensure that they are connected during the learning process, the lecturer engages students in a dialogue about their interests and needs, listens attentively, expresses empathy, and creates a sense of trust and respect. The following is the data from questionnaires regarding the learning community felt by students:

**Table 3. Result of the Questionnaire in Science for Lower Grade & PSAL Primary School Mathematics**

	Indicator Biblical Learning Community	Concrete Actions Perceived by Students
<b>Teacher-Student Interaction</b>	Teacher creates a space where students felt cared for and connected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The lecturer provides constructive feedback on students' work, questions, and opinions to encourage students to grow.</li> <li>• The lecturer asks questions during the lesson and asks students' opinions.</li> <li>• The lecturer always checks the presence and readiness of students, for example by asking students to turn on</li> </ul>

Teacher engages students in dialogue about their interests and needs, listens attentively, and expresses empathy

- the camera during synchronous sessions and asking how they are.
  - The lecturer explains the flow, materials, and assignments clearly.
  - The lecturer calls the student's name and gives a room for students to ask questions and convey inconvenient things.
  - The lecturer always answers students' questions.
  - The lecturer always pays attention to the progress of students' work so that the given assignments are aligned with their interests and needs.
  - When there is a network problem, the lecturer allows students to turn off the camera and submit the assignment when the network is good.
  - The lecturer listens to students' feelings or complaints when they finished the assignment.
  - The lecturer explains patiently when students do not understand the materials and always makes sure that students understand.
  - The lecturer asks how the students feel and the difficulties during the learning process.
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	Teacher creates a sense of trust and respect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The lecturer prays for students who are not feeling well or sick.</li><li>• The lecturer provides concrete solutions.</li><li>• The lecturer provides input in easy-to-understand language.</li><li>• The lecturer approaches students individually for the negligence done by the student.</li><li>• The lecturer always gives clear directions and instructions, as well as step-by-step support.</li><li>• The lecturer appreciates students learning outcomes and gives encouragement and motivation.</li><li>• The lecturer builds open interaction and a sense of comfort in learning.</li><li>• The lecturer always provides a space to discuss and respond to each other.</li><li>• The lecturer initiates a slight casual conversation before the class begins.</li><li>• There is a small number of students who do not know their friends well because during virtual learning they can only communicate via the internet. Most students can recognize their group mates and know the needs of their friends.</li><li>• Some students felt less appreciated when</li></ul>
<b>Student-Student Interaction</b>	Students have consideration for the feelings and learning needs of other members in his/her group, and also encourage others to contribute	

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Students show solid  
cooperation in the group

- expressing opinions in groups, but most students felt heard and cared for in groups.
- Some students contribute ideas and are responsible for each assignment.
  - Some students do not carry out the agreed responsibilities.
  - Students make contributions such as editing images and designing PPTs.
  - Students help other friends when experiencing problems in online learning.
  - Students give encouragement and support in groups
  - Not all group members would want to discuss it together.
  - Some students are not responding actively.
  - Students help each other in making projects.
  - Students remind each other in groups, especially passive friends, often procrastinate, and are difficult to be contacted.
  - Some students are consistent with time and not selfish in the group.
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### **Iterative Process in Group Project-Based Learning Cultivates Biblical Learning Community in Virtual Learning Environment**

Virtual learning becomes a challenging condition for educators to build a biblical learning community. The characteristics of virtual and hybrid learning that make the lack of physical touch and direct interaction can indeed create a lack of interpersonal relationships in the classroom. However, the principle of truth that is the foundation of Christian education is the strength that the class must still function as a learning community that loves and cares for each other. As Graham (2003), said that we are meant to live in fellowship with God and others to share meaningful experiences. In increasingly rapid technological developments, teachers and students need to work together to build relationships that bring shalom to the classroom. An educator needs to plan strategies that can be done to build a learning community.

Based on the data obtained, educators seek to form a learning community through an iterative process in project-based learning groups. The principle of collaboration offered by project-based learning becomes a forum for teachers and students to form a biblical learning community. The formation of study groups is very necessary and trains students to relate to others. One student said that the group project required students to be able to develop relationships in the classroom, although the process was not easy. It is a beauty that each individual in the class is formed through group-project-based learning that is carried out.

In this study, in addition to group formation, educators design processes that occur in groups so that they are effective in forming relationships. The role of educators in assisting each group (collaborating, discussing, evaluating) in working on projects is also one of the most important, where educators become facilitators. The lecturer encourages students in groups to learn to provide objective input on the work of each group member. The relationship that occurs through giving each other objective input on the work that has been done is an important thing because it will help each student in doing their revision. Through group study, students learn to give each other input, students learn to know their friends, learn to evaluate objectively, and learn to listen and understand others.

The role of educators in a classroom during PjBL is very vital. First, lecturers need to convey clear goals about what will be achieved through project-based learning groups, including providing problems to work on.



Second, the lecturer makes project plans according to the RPS given at the beginning of the lecture. Third, the lecturer arranges a schedule every week for each group to share the progress of the project being carried out. Fourth, lecturers and students monitor the work and collaboration process of each group and provide feedback. Fifth, the lecturer assesses student projects and provides feedback. Students are also allowed to provide feedback on the results shared by other groups. Sixth, lecturers provide opportunities for students to reflect and fill out collaborative assessments based on the collaboration carried out in making projects.

As stated by Berkhof & Cornelius (2010), that educators have the authority to regulate classes and educators must create a sense of trust and respect in class to create a sense of belonging. In this study, educators set an example for students in terms of creating a space where students feel cared for and connected, engaging students in dialogue about their interests and needs, listening attentively, and expressing empathy. Students feel comfortable studying in a warm and mutually supportive classroom atmosphere as educators show love, mercy, and dependence on all students in the classroom. At the end of the semester, the lecturer also provides opportunities for each group to carry out self-evaluation and reconciliation. This is very important to develop students' abilities in self-analysis and confirming to group colleagues, as well as in resolving internal and external conflicts.

In this study, most of students responded well and could show indicators of a learning community when given a learning process in a project-based learning group. Based on existing data, students still need to practice communication skills to be able to communicate effectively with fellow friends in the group by learning to listen to the opinions of their friends and learn to respond well to the difficulties experienced by others. Also, some students look passive, so they feel less contributing to the group. This reality proves that students experience formation to learn to accept the strengths and weaknesses of others.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the discussion, it can be concluded that building a biblical learning community in virtual learning can be done through an iterative

process in group project-based learning. All processes in the project-based learning group can support the build of a biblical learning community because it is based on the principles of love, mercy, and dependence. God's love in educators makes educators able to share that love with students and students can also share the love with fellow friends in groups/classes. Lecturers and students both realize that in a class there is indeed uniqueness and difference, and each person is placed to complement other individuals to achieve a goal. This principle can be a motivation for every individual in the class to build a biblical learning community that can bring shalom.

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