

TEFL in a Japanese IT University: Adjusting for Cultural Learning Practices with Open-Source Tools and an LMS

Abstract

Throughout their public school education, Japanese students are socialized into cultural learning practices (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003) that emphasize group-oriented tasks. Well-organized group work is paramount to successful EFL teaching in Japan. In this paper, we look at how freeware and open-source software tools are used in two different modes of instruction at a Japanese computer science university to organize both individual and group tasks. The first is a 2nd year undergraduate Technical Reading course that relies extensively on the use of concept mapping using CmapTools, a freeware system, and the management of groups and roles with Moodle, an open-source learning management system. The second is a 3rd year undergraduate Phonetics and Pronunciation course that uses Praat, open-source software for acoustic analysis, also with course administration through Moodle, but presently has a more individual focus. An important aspect of our work is the systematization of group process in language and communication courses and the development of a context for experimentation and action research.