1 Introduction

The European Union is fostering the development of new learning environments to integrate more interactive techniques in the traditional classroom. The Council of Europe’s e-Learning Initiative has established a Common European Framework of Reference for Language Learning (CEF) which regards ‘language learning as preparation for the active use of the language for communication and social interaction’ [1]. The e-Learning Initiative was adopted by the European Commission in the year 2000 [2], and defined e-Learning “as the use of new multimedia technologies and the Internet to improve the quality of learning by facilitating access to resources and services as well as remote exchanges and collaboration”. Following these directives about using the new technologies to develop skills such as the ability to communicate and to work in group, we have designed an online learning appliance to practice the skill of writing in a foreign language by using authentic tools for writing, computers. Computing devices in online learning environments can help us to apply the collaborative learning techniques that are proving so effective in the learning of the oral skills in face-to-face environments (work in pairs, in groups, role play, etc.) to writing activities.

AWLA is an online learning appliance designed to practice the skill of writing in a foreign language. It is based on the new learning theories based on knowledge construction. With AWLA, Web-based ubiquitous technologies enable collaborative work, in situated environments where
learners are engaged in a community of learners to produce authentic writing as a means of learning and practising a foreign language as well as for learning any discipline where writing is a necessity. The learners using AWLA can directly practice writing on the Web, with the characteristics of synchronous and asynchronous interaction and ubiquity that the Web offers. This resource facilitates the collaborative edition of text, simultaneously providing access to contents and reference information and offering tools for communication. The text edition can be monitored by the teacher who can control the collaborative edition as well, checking the contributions that each learner individually makes, including plagiarism. With a methodology based on tasks and scenarios, the system has been easily adaptable to diverse educative environments (schools of languages, university centres, researchers and teacher training, in distance and blended learning environments). This is an analysis of the learning-to-write courses and experiences. AWLA is currently being localized to diverse languages and integrated into some online learning systems, such as Moodle and AIOLE, An Interactive Online Learning Environment.

The AWLA System (which stands for A Writing Learning Appliance) tries to evolve towards the practice of collaborative writing with computing tools, from the traditional classroom to ubiquitous e-Learning environments accessible from anywhere at any time. The Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) are integrated in the traditional classroom by providing access to the Internet, first with computers connected to the Internet, later evolving to using wireless devices. This will make it possible to apply the e-Learning Action Plan proposed by the European Community in order to acquire new basic skills such as the ones related to information technologies and foreign languages, among others [2]. Thus, learning will be enhanced with a mobile computing system that enables the work in group as well as using the ICT from any classroom, from outside the educational centre, from home or from the workplace. The participants feel really motivated due to the interaction provided and the availability of the learning design, always on display on their writing environment. In the last section, we are presenting here the results of the usage analysis in the first stages of the system deployment.

2 Web-based Mobile Infrastructure

E-Learning in educational centres was first achieved by means of static electronic tools (desktop PCs) in dedicated rooms full of computers (labs). Currently, mobile devices integrated in the traditional classroom are becoming quite common. ICT provide e-Learning with the capacity to be