

## Comparing Online Reading Strategy Use in High and Low Achievers: Implications and Applications

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### ABSTRACT

This survey-based comparative study examines disparities in perceived online reading strategy utilization among 488 English language learners, categorized into low-achieving (n = 267) and high-achieving (n = 221) cohorts. The findings reveal that while most learners prioritize problem-solving strategies—specifically focused re-reading—significant divergences emerge in their secondary approaches. Low achievers typically rely on translation and reduced reading speeds, whereas high achievers leverage prior knowledge and skimming techniques. Distinct from traditional comparative research, this study identifies these specific strategic gaps as a foundation for evidence-based pedagogy. By explicitly integrating high-leverage strategies into classroom instruction, educators can provide low-attaining learners with the specific cognitive tools necessary to improve reading performance and bridge the achievement gap.

**Keywords** : Online Reading Strategy, OSORS, Digital Literacy, Reading Strategy Awareness

**Citation Guide** : Dirgantari, A. S., Susantiningdyah, H., AS, H. C., & Pardede, A. (2025). Comparing online reading strategy use in high and low achievers: implications and applications. *Seltics Journal: Scope of English Language Teaching Literature and Linguistics*, 8(2), 244-252. <https://doi.org/10.46918/seltics.v8i2.3012>

**Article History** : **Received** : 04-11-2025

**Revised** : 22-12-2025

**Accepted** : 25-12-2025

### INTRODUCTION

In the current era, reading is no longer dominated by printed text; the soaring influence of the internet has fundamentally reshaped how students engage with information. Modern learners rarely rely on physical libraries, instead utilizing smartphones and laptops to store and access thousands of digital files. This shift is not merely a matter of convenience but a transformation of the educational landscape, evidenced by the integration of Learning Management Systems (LMS) and the rapid transition to online testing following the COVID-19 pandemic.

For English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, particularly in countries like Indonesia, reading in English presents distinct challenges compared to native-language reading. While online and offline reading share the goal of comprehension, they are not identical processes; online environments present unique obstacles and demand specific digital literacy skills. Central to navigating these challenges is the application of reading strategies—conscious, flexible actions that allow readers to solve problems and approach material analytically (Ahmed, 2019; Öztürk, 2018).

To measure these strategies, researchers have developed various instruments, such as the Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory (MARS) and the Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS). Recognizing the unique demands of digital texts, Anderson (2003) modified these

tools to create the Online Survey of Reading Strategies (OSORS), a 38-item instrument designed to capture the specific behaviors of readers in online environments.

Recent global research has utilized the OSORS to identify common reading dispositions (Yaghi, 2021) and the influence of gender and university levels on strategy use (Al-khresheh & Al Basheer Ben Ali, 2023). Within the Indonesian context, studies have begun to map how educators and students use these tools. Mudra (2018) found that pre-service teachers prioritize global strategies, while Rianto (2022a) identified a significant link between a teacher's internet literacy and their adoption of support strategies.

However, a critical gap remains in the current literature regarding the "achievement divide." While previous studies have established a general connection between strategy use and comprehension—with Rianto (2022b) and Par (2020) both suggesting that higher comprehension often correlates with problem-solving strategies—few studies have conducted a direct, granular comparison between high-achieving and low-achieving cohorts.

Based on this gap, the current research is driven by two primary objectives:

1. To compare the perceived use of online reading strategies by high-achiever and low-achiever English learners to ascertain the distinctions in their typical reading activities.
2. To identify the common and less common strategies employed by learners of different proficiency levels.

By identifying not only whether these groups differ, but also which specific strategies create the divide, this research aims to provide a diagnostic foundation for teachers. The insights garnered here will allow educators to move beyond generic instruction and instead modify their pedagogical approaches to model the specific high-leverage habits of successful readers for those struggling to improve.

## **METHODS**

To gather data for this study, the primary research instrument will be the Online Survey of Reading Strategies (OSORS), a well-established questionnaire originally developed by Anderson (2003). To ensure that the questions are clear and fully understood by the participants, the entire survey has been carefully translated into Bahasa Indonesia. This adapted version will then be formatted into a Google Form and distributed directly to students via email, making it convenient for them to access and complete.

The participants for this research will be university students from the Institut Teknologi Kalimantan. The primary objective of distributing this survey is to gain a clear understanding of the strategies these students most frequently use when engaging in online reading activities, whether for academic purposes or personal learning. By analyzing their responses, this study aims to identify the common patterns and habits that define their approach to reading in a digital environment.

## **Participants**

The study involved 488 undergraduate students from Institut Teknologi Kalimantan, comprising 299 males and 189 females. Participants represented a diverse range of academic disciplines, including Mathematics, Information Systems, Electrical Engineering, and Materials and Metallurgical Engineering.

To facilitate a comparative analysis, participants were stratified into two cohorts based on their performance on a standardized English proficiency test (TOEFL). The categorization criteria were defined as follows:

1. Low Achievers (n = 267): Students scoring within the A1 to A2 proficiency levels on the CEFR scale, indicating basic to high-elementary English usage.
2. High Achievers (n = 221): Students achieving B1 or above on the CEFR scale, representing intermediate to advanced linguistic competence.

This distinction ensures that the comparison between groups is based on verified standardized metrics rather than subjective self-assessment.

### Instrument

The instrument used in this research is the Online Survey of Reading Strategies (OSORS) developed by Anderson (2003), which was adapted from the Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS) by Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002). The OSORS consists of 38 items categorized into three sub-scales: global, problem-solving, and support strategies. To ensure clarity and minimize linguistic barriers, the instrument was translated into Indonesian using a back-translation method. The translated version underwent expert validation to ensure content accuracy and conceptual equivalence between the English and Indonesian versions. Aside from the language translation, no modifications were made to the original items. The final questionnaire was distributed digitally via Google Forms through email and text messaging.

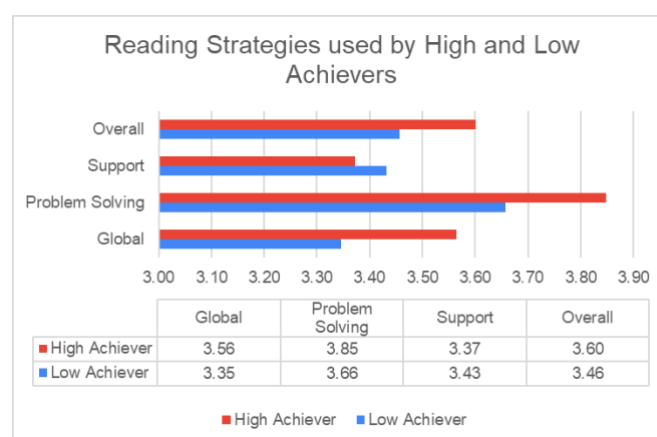
### Data Analysis

Once all the student responses are collected from the Google Form, the raw data will be downloaded and neatly organized in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet for initial review. The first step in the analysis will be to determine the most frequently used online reading strategies among the entire group of participants. This will give us a clear, overall picture of our students' current habits.

Following that, the participants will be categorized into two groups—high-achieving and low-achieving students—based on their academic performance. This division will allow us to conduct a comparative analysis to examine if there are distinct patterns in the strategies employed by each group. To ensure our findings are robust, we will use SPSS software to run statistical tests. This final step will help us determine if any observed differences in strategy use between the two groups are statistically significant and not simply due to random chance.

## FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The survey shows that for the most part, both students with high and low achievement in English believe that they have medium to high awareness of the use of reading strategies. This can be seen in Figure 1, where the average overall score for students with high English achievement is 3.6, which means high awareness, and students with low achievement score 3.46, which shows medium to high awareness.



**Figure 1.** Survey Result

From the data presented, we can see a clear overview of how different reading strategies are used by high-achieving and low-achieving students. Looking at the overall picture, high achievers generally use reading strategies more frequently (with a mean score of 3.60) compared to low achievers (3.46). Interestingly, for both groups of students, the most heavily used category is Problem Solving. This suggests that actively working through difficulties while reading is the go-to approach for almost everyone, regardless of their academic performance. These results are similar to several studies, which show that problem-solving strategies are the most popular strategy among EFL students (Meniado, 2016; Villanueva, 2022).

Diving into the specifics, high achievers show a greater use of both Global strategies (planning and managing their reading) and Problem-Solving strategies. However, the results reveal an exception when it comes to Support strategies. In this single category, low-achieving students actually report a slightly higher use (3.43) than their high-achieving counterparts (3.37). This might indicate that students who find reading more challenging are more likely to lean on external aids, such as online dictionaries, translators, or asking for help, to support their understanding.

After running the data through SPSS, the analysis shows that there is no statistically significant difference between high-achieving and low-achieving students in terms of how they use reading strategies. This means that while we might have noticed some small variations in the raw scores between the two groups, these differences are not consistent or large enough to be considered meaningful from a statistical perspective.

When examining the specific results for each category, the empirical basis for this strategic parity becomes evident. The significance values (p-values) for all strategy categories were well above the standard 0.05 threshold: Global Strategies ( $p = .334$ ), Problem-Solving Strategies ( $p = .238$ ), and Support Strategies ( $p = .907$ ). Statistically, these results suggest that the variations observed are likely attributable to individual preferences rather than a systematic pattern tied to academic achievement.

This absence of significant difference, particularly within a large sample size ( $N = 488$ ), indicates that high and low achievers may share a common "metacognitive awareness" regarding digital literacy. One likely explanation is the homogeneity of the digital environment, where platform features like hyperlinking and scrolling standardize navigation habits for all users. Furthermore, since the OSORS measures perceived rather than actual use, both cohorts may possess a similar theoretical understanding of which strategies *should* be applied, even if the efficiency of their execution differs. Consequently, while raw scores show minor fluctuations, there is insufficient evidence to suggest that English proficiency level is a primary determinant of the frequency of online reading strategy utilization.

**Table 1.** Top 10 Reading Strategies Used by High and Low Achievers

Type of Reading Strategy	Top 10 Reading Strategies by High Achievers	Type of Reading Strategy	Top 10 Reading Strategies by Low Achievers
PROB	11. I try to get back on track when I lose concentration.	PROB	11. I try to get back on track when I lose concentration.
PROB	28. When online text becomes difficult, I re-read it to increase my understanding.	PROB	28. When online text becomes difficult, I re-read it to increase my understanding.
GLOB	5. I think about what I know to help me understand what I read online.	PROB	9. I read slowly and carefully to make sure I understand what I am reading online.

Type of Reading Strategy	Top 10 Reading Strategies by High Achievers	Type of Reading Strategy	Top 10 Reading Strategies by Low Achievers
PROB	9. I read slowly and carefully to make sure I understand what I am reading online.	SUP	37. When reading online, I translate from English into my native language.
GLOB	6. I take an overall view of the online text to see what it is about before reading it.	PROB	16. When online text becomes difficult, I pay closer attention to what I am reading.
GLOB	26. I check my understanding when I come across new information.	GLOB	6. I take an overall view of the online text to see what it is about before reading it.
PROB	31. When I read online, I guess the meaning of unknown words or phrases.	GLOB	26. I check my understanding when I come across new information.
GLOB	1. I have a purpose in mind when I read online.	GLOB	5. I think about what I know to help me understand what I read online.
PROB	16. When online text becomes difficult, I pay closer attention to what I am reading.	GLOB	30. I check to see if my guesses about the online text are right or wrong.
PROB	22. I try to picture or visualize information to help remember what I read online.	PROB	31. When I read online, I guess the meaning of unknown words or phrases.

From Table 1, we can see that at a glance, the top 10 reading strategies used by the high and low achievers are quite similar, as 8 out of 10 items are the same. This table provides a fascinating side-by-side comparison of the top reading strategies employed by high-achieving and low-achieving students. Perhaps the most striking takeaway is just how similar the two lists are. Both groups rely on a common set of core problem-solving and global strategies to navigate online texts. For instance, when a text becomes difficult, students in both groups report that they “re-read it to improve understanding” (#28), “slow down to read more carefully” (#9), and “try to get back on track when they lose concentration” (#11).

However, the small differences between the lists are quite telling. The high achievers' unique strategies include “having a clear purpose in mind before they even start reading” (#1) and “actively guessing the meaning of unknown words or phrases” (#31). In contrast, the low achievers' list includes a key Support (SUP) strategy that is completely absent from the high achievers' list: “translating text from English into their native language when reading online” (#37). This suggests a subtle but important difference in approach. While both groups are diligent problem-solvers, the high achievers seem to focus more on proactive and goal-setting strategies, whereas the low achievers are more likely to rely on external support tools like translation to aid their comprehension.

**Table 2.** Bottom 10 Reading Strategies Used by High and Low Achievers

Type of Reading Strategy	Bottom 10 Reading Strategies by High Achievers	Type of Reading Strategy	Bottom 10 Reading Strategies by Low Achievers
GLOB	3. I participate in live chat with native speakers of English.	GLOB	3. I participate in live chat with native speakers of English.
GLOB	2. I participate in live chat with other learners of English.	GLOB	2. I participate in live chat with other learners of English.

SUP	12. I print out a hard copy of the online text, then underline or circle information to help me remember it.	SUP	4. I take notes while reading online to help me understand what I read.
SUP	4. I take notes while reading online to help me understand what I read.	SUP	12. I print out a hard copy of the online text, then underline or circle information to help me remember it.
GLOB	23. I use typographical features like bold face and italics to identify key information.	GLOB	23. I use typographical features like bold face and italics to identify key information.
SUP	7. When online text becomes difficult, I read aloud to help me understand what I read.	PROB	34. I critically evaluate the online text before choosing to use the information I read
SUP	37. When reading online, I translate from English into my native language.	GLOB	24. I critically analyze and evaluate the information presented in the online text.
GLOB	18. I use tables, figures, and pictures in the online text to increase my understanding.	PROB	36. When reading online, I look for sites that cover both sides of an issue.
PROB	34. I critically evaluate the online text before choosing to use the information I read	GLOB	18. I use tables, figures, and pictures in the online text to increase my understanding.
GLOB	17. I read pages on the Internet for academic purposes.	SUP	7. When online text becomes difficult, I read aloud to help me understand what I read.

From Table 2, we can see the comparison of the 10 least-used online reading strategies for high and low achievers, classifying them as Global (GLOB), Support (SUP), or Problem-Solving (PROB). What is immediately striking is the significant overlap: eight of the ten strategies are identical for both groups. This suggests a common set of behaviors that both high- and low-performing students tend to avoid. For example, neither group frequently engages in interactive Global strategies like “live chats with native speaker’s (#3) or other learners (#2). Similarly, traditional Support strategies, such as “printing and underlining” (#12) or “taking notes” (#4), are equally unpopular across the board, as is the habit of “reading aloud when encountering difficulty” (#7).

Perhaps most telling is that both high and low achievers list “critically evaluate the online text” (PROB #34) and using “tables, figures, and pictures” (GLOB #18) among their bottom 10 tactics, indicating a potential gap in certain analytical skills across the achievement spectrum. The primary difference lies in the final two strategies. High achievers specifically avoid “translating text into their native language” (SUP #37) and “reading pages for academic purposes” (GLOB #17). In contrast, the strategies uniquely avoided by low achievers point more directly to a deficit in critical engagement; they are particularly unlikely to “critically analyze and evaluate” information (GLOB #24) or “look for sites that cover both sides of an issue” (PROB #36).

One of the most intriguing findings of this study is the apparent lack of a significant difference between the reading strategies reported by high-achieving and low-achieving students. This similarity, however, may be misleading. It suggests that while students across the achievement spectrum believe they are utilizing certain strategies, the effectiveness of that use might vary dramatically. This highlights a crucial distinction between simple awareness and skillful application. As Mokhtari and Reichard (2002) aptly noted, it is not enough for a reader to simply know of a given strategy. For successful comprehension to occur, the reader must also possess the critical, procedural knowledge of when, where, and how to deploy it effectively.



The disparity between a student's perceived awareness of strategies and their actual reading performance suggests a significant "Know-What" vs. "Know-How" gap. This phenomenon is supported by the recent work of Putri Salsyabillah et al. (2025), whose investigation into Indonesian students found no statistically significant relationship between metacognitive reading strategies and reading comprehension. Their findings imply that simply possessing knowledge of reading strategies—as measured by self-report inventories—does not automatically translate into improved academic outcomes. This supports the notion that both high and low achievers in the current study may report similar levels of strategic awareness while differing fundamentally in how they apply those strategies to decode complex digital texts.

In contrast, El Madani et al. (2024) observed a linear relationship between reading proficiency and metacognitive awareness among Moroccan EFL students, noting that as proficiency increases, the ability to monitor and regulate thinking processes typically grows proportionally. This suggests that while learners may reach a "plateau" of strategic awareness, high achievers are more likely to engage in the self-regulation necessary to convert that awareness into improved comprehension. When these studies are viewed alongside the current results, it becomes clear that the "achievement divide" is likely not caused by a lack of strategic knowledge among low achievers, but rather by their inability to move beyond a linear, sentence-level focus toward the more sophisticated, self-regulated monitoring characteristic of high-performing readers.

This gap in skillful application, rather than just knowledge, is where the real differences likely emerge. A clear example is the reliance on direct translation: low achievers in this study frequently utilized it, whereas high achievers intentionally avoided it, likely recognizing it as a surface-level tactic that can hinder deeper comprehension. This reliance on the native language is not exclusive to students; Sukkari (2024) observed that a significant majority of educators (81.8%) utilize the L1 (Bahasa Melayu) to explain concepts when students face comprehension barriers. They identified low English proficiency as the primary driver for this shift. This suggests that for the low achievers in this study, translation is often a "crutch" necessitated by linguistic limitations.

Furthermore, a key distinction may lie less in strategy and more in habit. High achievers were more frequently found to be reading for enjoyment, suggesting that extensive reading builds the fluency and confidence that low achievers lack. Consequently, the challenge for educators is to move beyond L1-based explanations and encourage less proficient readers to engage in high-volume, extensive reading activities that move them away from surface-level translation toward autonomous English comprehension.

When looking at the types of strategies used, problem-solving strategies were the most dominant, a finding consistent with several previous studies. Students seem most comfortable actively trying to fix comprehension breakdowns as they happen. This focus, however, appears to come at the expense of other vital approaches. The low scores in Global strategies, for instance, are telling. They indicate a tendency for students to just dive into reading while mostly ignoring helpful structural and typographic clues like titles, headings, graphs, tables, and the overall length of the text—all features designed to orient them and activate prior knowledge.

A similar neglect was seen with Support strategies. Tactics such as printing a hard copy or taking notes were rarely used, but this is likely a pragmatic, or even logical, response to the online reading environment. These actions are simply inconvenient, especially when students are browsing the internet for casual or "fun" reading activities rather than deep, academic study. Nevertheless, the underutilization of both Global and Support strategies suggests a clear pedagogical need for more practice and direct instruction in these areas. It is essential, however, to approach all these findings

with caution. This research relied on a limited sample, so these results might not be applicable in other universities or learning contexts. Further research, utilizing larger and more diverse student populations, is needed to confirm these patterns.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined the perceived online reading strategy utilization among 488 Indonesian university students. The findings reveal a significant degree of metacognitive parity, where both high-achieving and low-achieving learners exhibit a shared awareness of reading strategies. Across both cohorts, the hierarchy of preference remained consistent: Problem-Solving strategies were utilized most frequently, followed by Global and Support strategies. While raw scores showed minor fluctuations, the lack of statistical significance ( $p > .05$ ) across all categories suggests that English proficiency is not the primary driver of strategy awareness in a digital environment.

The research highlights a critical distinction between "knowing what" a strategy is and "knowing how" to apply it effectively. The real achievement gap appears to reside in the orchestration and timing of these strategies. Low achievers, despite their awareness, often adopt a linear reading model, focusing intensely on literal meaning and sentence-level perfection. This is evidenced by their tendency to get "stuck" on a narrow range of support strategies, such as direct dictionary translation and reading aloud, while failing to connect current segments to the broader context of the text. Conversely, high achievers demonstrate a more holistic approach, leveraging global strategies to manage the reading process.

To bridge this gap, classroom instruction must move beyond the mere introduction of strategy lists toward direct, explicit modelling. Teachers should demonstrate the successful habits of high-achieving readers—such as skimming for gist and leveraging prior knowledge—to help low achievers move past a purely linear focus. Furthermore, since digital reading demands vary by genre, students must be exposed to diverse text types, from scientific papers to news articles, to develop strategic flexibility. Ultimately, fostering independent reading habits outside the classroom is essential for students to transition from rigid, "in-the-moment" problem-solving to becoming fluid, adaptive readers.

**Recommendations for Future Research:** Because quantitative inventories like the OSORS measure perceived awareness rather than real-time execution, future studies should utilize qualitative methods, such as "think-aloud" protocols. This would allow researchers to observe the quality of strategy application and the specific moments where low achievers falter in their reading process, providing a more granular understanding of the achievement divide in online EFL contexts.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The researchers would like to extend their heartfelt appreciation to Institut Teknologi Kalimantan for providing the significant resources and environment that were necessary for this research. In addition, the researchers would like to express their appreciation to the students who took the time to fill in questionnaires, which was essential to the research that she conducted.

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