Assessing Middle School English Teachers’ Knowledge and Teaching Frequency of
Essential Reading Skills

Introduction

Learning to read is not a natural process. It is an acquired skill that students must be
taught through specific and systematic techniques. In middle school the prevailing belief among
teachers is that students were taught and learned reading skills in elementary school. Therefore
reading is de-contextualized and driven by content acquisition versus skill acquisition (Guthrie &
Davis, 2003). Many students with limited reading skills become discouraged by middle school
reading expectations. These students are unable to learn necessary subject content because they
are unable to learn vital reading comprehension strategies independently (Guthrie & Davis,
2003).

Low reading achievement is the root cause of low performing schools, and is detrimental
to students, and decreases public confidence in school systems (Moats, 1999). Reading skills are
fundamental to students’ success in all academic subjects and in obtaining and maintaining jobs
as adults (Barton, 1997). Literacy demands are steadily increasing in the job market, and students
who are considered functionally literate will be viewed as functionally illiterate in the near future
(Hoffman & Pearson, 2000). This trend, if unchecked, will be particularly devastating for
African Americans, Hispanics, those with limited English proficiency, and socio-economically
disadvantaged students whose failure rate in reading ranges from 60% to 70%. Despite the high
rate of reading failure, most students’ reading abilities can be increased with improved classroom
instruction that includes research-based elements and practices (Moats, 1999).