

## NIUE WORD LIST

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In 1973 the New Zealand Council for Educational Research was asked by the Government of Niue to plan and carry out a research project designed to provide Niuean teachers with a list of basic words which could be used in schools in the teaching of Spelling. The current lists in use had been developed in metropolitan countries, and were felt unsuited to the spelling needs of Niuean children.

The Council accepted this request and invited all Niuean teachers of classes from Year 4 upwards to assist by providing samples of their children's written compositions. The children were asked to write two compositions on a variety of topics, and these were collected and sent to NZCER for analysis.

The compositions were screened for errors, typed out in full, and punched on to data cards for a computer analysis of the word frequencies. Approximately 135,000 running words were analysed in this way. The computer arranged all the words in alphabetical order, counted the total frequency for each word, (class by class and total) and counted the number of essays in which each word occurred. The differences between class levels were small, and inconsistent, so the results from seven class levels were combined into one. The absolute word frequency was found to be a more stable base to use than the number of essays in which each word occurred, but the latter measure was useful to identify words whose word count was artificially inflated.

A Niuean Word List of 900 words was prepared, in which each word had occurred at least 10 times in the children's written compositions. These 900 were found to make up 95% of the total words used. Only 4,500 different words were found in the analysis.

Plural nouns were not included in the list unless they were irregular (children) or presented a significant spelling problem (babies) or were rarely found in the singular form (lollies, crops). Only the basic form of verbs was included (arrive, but not arrived, arriving, etc.) unless the other forms were irregular and frequently used (know-knew; do, does, did, done, etc.). When different forms of the same word were combined their frequencies were also combined.

Comparisons with a comparable New Zealand word list (the NZCER Alphabetical Spelling List) revealed several discrepancies of interest. Niuean children used with higher frequency such words as coconut, plantation, bush, oven, village, uga, island, hunt, cook, canoe, assemblyman and local place names. High frequency words from the New Zealand list, absent from the Niue List included such words as bat, close, doll, fun, pussy, summer, toy, street, ice, elephant, frog, zoo, hotel, autumn, fireplace, gallon, glass, wheat, business, company, etc.

In summary, of the first 180 words on the Niue List (i.e. those with frequency over 100) 134 were placed in the first level (of seven) in the New Zealand list, 27 at Level 2, 5 at Level 3, 5 at Level 4, 3 at Level 6 and 3 not included at all. On the basis of these discrepancies, it was concluded that there was ample justification for a separate word list to be used by Niuean teachers in their spelling programmes.