



# **UNIVERSITY OF EMBU**

## **SPEECH**

**By**

**PROF. DANIEL MUGENDI NJIRU**

**Vice- Chancellor,**

**University of Embu**

**During the Opening Ceremony**

**Of**

**The International Mother Language Day**

**On**

**Monday, 21<sup>st</sup> February, 2022**

**SPEECH BY PROF. DANIEL MUGENDI NJIRU, VICE-CHANCELLOR,  
UNIVERSITY OF EMBU DURING THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE  
INTERNATIONAL MOTHER LANGUAGE DAY CELEBRATIONS ON  
MONDAY, 21<sup>ST</sup> FEBRUARY, 2022**

- Secretary General & CEO, KNATCOM – Dr. Evangeline Njoka
- County Secretary, Embu County
- The Chief Officer, Gender, Children, Culture & Social Services -  
County Government of Embu
- Members of the University of Embu Management Board and  
Senate
- Invited Guests
- University of Embu Staff
- Students
- Ladies & Gentlemen

**Good Morning**

It is my pleasure to welcome you all to the University of Embu. Thank you for choosing the University to host this year's celebrations to mark the International Mother Language Day (IMLD). I wish to commend members of the IMLD Organizing Committee, led by Dr. Dr. Evangeline Njoka and Prof. Fredrick Njoka, for the time and effort they have put in making this event a success. I thank you also for inviting me as the Chief Guest. This is a great honour for me and the University as a whole. It is a demonstration of the confidence that you have in us and the activities we are engaged in to appreciate and promote cultural and linguistic diversity among us.

This International Mother Language Day (IMLD) is recognized worldwide as an avenue for promoting multilingualism and cultural and linguistic diversity. The day is celebrated every year on February 21. It was

instituted in 1952 by the Bangladeshi migrants and other social activists who protested to maintain the existence of their mother tongue, and were massacred which claimed the lives of 16 people. As a result, the United Nations honoured the efforts by the Bangladeshi people to protect their language by establishing February 21<sup>st</sup> as the International Mother Language Day in 2000. Since then, the UNESCO has used this day to promote awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity, to celebrate all mother languages in the world as well as to encourage education from early years of learning based on first language or mother tongue.

The theme of this year's celebration is ***"Using technology for multilingual learning: Challenges and opportunities"***. It raises the potential role of technology in advancing multilingual education and support the development of quality teaching and learning for all.

The idea of the mother language resonates well with our learning aspirations as a University. First language is the backbone of learning and culture in our society. Without mother language, there can be no preservation of differences in our culture and languages which foster tolerance and respect for others. All language and cultures are strong in morality, ethics, friendships and family values.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

This year's celebration is an opportunity to reflect on the role languages and dialect play in our lives, and the importance of harnessing the existing technology in preserving linguistic diversity in the world and in our communities. Every language is unique and it gives insight into one's culture and interpretation of knowledge. In Kenya, we are so fortunate that we get the opportunity to experience 44 indigenous languages and the cultures associated with them. Learning and appreciating the diversity

is an enriching occurrence filled with emotion. More than just a means of communication, our mother languages link us with our heritage and delineate our socio-cultural identity.

It is saddening that as years pass, more and more languages are becoming endangered as some languages are taking up significant percentages of the world's speakers. With languages like English and Kiswahili taking preference in Kenya, indigenous languages are slowly being used less as there isn't a large demand for these languages to be used in a global perspective.

It is therefore important for the entire education sector to keep UNESCO's vision alive by promoting mother tongue-based education with a growing understanding of its importance, particularly in early development education, and being more committed to its development in society. Countries like Germany, Japan, China and Russia which use their mother tongue to teach have confirmed that learning concepts in mother tongue has significant benefits to learners:

1. Mother tongue develops a child's personal, social and cultural identity.
2. Unlike foreign language, learning concepts in mother tongue helps a child develop their critical thinking and literacy skills.
3. Children learning in mother tongue adopt a better understanding of the curriculum.
4. Skills learnt in mother tongue do not have to be re-taught when the child transfers to a second language.
5. Children learning in mother tongue enjoy school more and learn faster due to feeling comfortable in their environment.
6. Self-esteem is higher for children learning in mother tongue.

7. Parent-child interaction increases as the parent can assist with homework.

Thus, with the growing popularity of bilingual education systems around the world, Kenya and Africa at large should focus their resources, particularly technological infrastructure, on establishing strong mother tongue programmes. As a University, we strive to contribute to UNESCO's mission by organizing for annual events such as cultural festivals where we get opportunity to showcase and celebrate our rich cultural heritage as a country.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Many activities have been planned for the day. These include narratives, drama, comedy, poetry, and music in various mother tongues. Cultural exhibitions and media trivia in mother language are also lined up in the programme. Most importantly, a panel discussion by a key note speaker, linguists and other professionals on the potential role of technology in advancing multilingual education and supporting development of quality teaching and learning for all is one of the key highlights of the programme. Key policy direction recommendations could be a product of the forum. I urge you all to book your seats for these very exciting events in the programme.

As I conclude, let me once again call upon each one of us to go back to the basics of our mother tongues and culture. Our multilingual society make us more resilient and conscious of the importance of effective and efficient communication in any language as well as between different languages. In line with the theme for this year's celebration, and to celebrate our multilingual diversity, I urge all of you to send your

message on International Mother Language Day through social media platforms in your mother tongues.

Ladies and gentlemen, with those few remarks, it is now my pleasure to declare the **International Mother Language Day 2022** officially open.

God Bless you all as you enjoy this mother language show.

Thank you.

**Prof. Daniel Mugendi Njiru, Ph.D**

**Vice-Chancellor**