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## **A Critical Evaluation of the Philosophical and Methodological Implications of Positivism in Research in the Discipline of Teaching English as a Second Language**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study aims to critically evaluate the effect of positivism as a research paradigm on studies done by Sri Lankan scholars in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL). Theoretically and pragmatically, TESL is situated under Applied Linguistics and in Sri Lanka under the faculties of Humanities and Social Sciences. There are multiple state and private universities in Sri Lanka where Teaching English as a Second Language is offered to undergraduates as a Bachelor of Arts degree programme under fully-fledged Departments of English Language Teaching (DELTA). This research is a mixed method study incorporating research participants and a meta-analysis of TESL/ELT (English Language Teaching) studies published in 2020 and 2021 in Sri Lanka. Researchers who are engaged in research in TESL and ELT were selected as research participants and their responses were analysed against the theoretical perspectives of Lincoln and Guba (1994), Holliday (2004) and Weideman (2012) on the impact of positivism on research in applied linguistics. The majority of the research participants focus on qualitative aspects in their research focusing on subjectivity and individualism. The research participants' primary methodological and philosophical foundations are largely influenced by post-positivism. In categorizing the previously published TESL studies into qualitative, quantitative and mixed method studies, 90, 30 and 51 studies were identified respectively. The majority of the TESL studies were done employing the qualitative and mixed method approaches. Therefore, the analysis of interviews and the meta-analysis of previously published studies show that the current research in Teaching English as a Second Language as a discipline in Sri Lankan context is not significantly influenced by positivism. However, with the emergence of the discipline of Teaching English as a Second Language as a unique discipline under fully-fledged departments separating from English Departments, there is a possibility of TESL research being more inclined to positivist research methods and quantitative research tools.

**Keywords:** *Positivism, Research Methodology, TESL, Applied Linguistics, Sri Lanka*