**Title: Applying DevOps principles to data engineering: A reproducible model for building a CI/CD pipeline for ETL workflows  
  
Author:** Dr. Joseph N. Njiru

**Abstract** The increasing reliance on data for strategic decision-making has made the reliability of data infrastructure a critical business concern. Manual data engineering workflows, however, often introduce operational risks that compromise data integrity and hinder reproducibility. This paper addresses the gap between traditional data engineering practices and the standards of modern software development by proposing a reproducible DataOps model. It presents a case study implementing a Continuous Integration and Continuous Deployment (CI/CD) pipeline for a Python-based Extract, Transform, and Load (ETL) job. The methodology uses GitHub Actions for workflow orchestration, pytest for multi-layered automated testing, Great Expectations for data quality validation, and Docker for containerisation. The results demonstrate that the pipeline achieves 100% pass rates across all test categories and produces build times of approximately 2.3 minutes and sub-minute deployment times, demonstrating pipeline efficiency. This study contributes a practical, fully reproducible model for implementing CI/CD, arguing that such DataOps practices are essential for mitigating production failures, improving development velocity, and establishing trustworthy and maintainable data systems.

**Keywords:** DataOps, CI/CD, Data Engineering, ETL, Automation, Reproducibility

**ORCID:** <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8810-8312>

You are absolutely right. My apologies for that critical oversight. The text referred to the tables and figures, but I failed to embed them within the manuscript body.

Here is the corrected and complete main manuscript with all tables and figures properly placed for final submission.

**Corrected Main Manuscript**

**1. Introduction**

The proliferation of data-driven business strategies has elevated data engineering from a support function to a mission-critical component of the modern enterprise. The reliability of the pipelines that extract, transform, and load data is paramount, as a single failure can halt the flow of data to decision-makers and erode organisational trust in data assets. Despite these high stakes, a significant gap persists between the practices of data engineering and those of the broader software engineering community. Many data workflows remain manual, exposing them to operational risks where a single, inadequately tested code change can disable a production system.

This ad-hoc approach is a direct contributor to the reproducibility crisis observed in computational and data-intensive science. The inability to consistently reproduce results from data workflows undermines the validity of analytical findings and creates a significant barrier to collaborative research and development. The central problem this paper addresses is the lack of a formal, reproducible framework for ensuring the reliability of data engineering workflows. This work is significant because it moves beyond theoretical arguments for DataOps and provides a concrete, replicable blueprint for its implementation.

This study seeks to answer the following research question. To what extent can the systematic implementation of a CI/CD pipeline, as a core DataOps practice, improve the reproducibility and reliability of ETL workflows? The paper addresses this by first establishing a conceptual framework that links CI/CD practices to data engineering outcomes. It then reviews the relevant literature before detailing a reproducible methodology. Finally, it presents the results of the implementation and discusses their implications for the field.

**2. Conceptual framework**

The theoretical backbone of this study is a framework that hypothesises a positive relationship between the adoption of CI/CD practices and key data engineering outcomes. The primary independent construct is the **CI/CD Pipeline Implementation**. This is composed of three core technical practices. automated testing, workflow orchestration, and environment containerisation.

The framework proposes that this implementation directly influences three dependent constructs.

1. **Code Reliability.** The degree to which the ETL code is free from defects, measured through automated test pass rates.
2. **Workflow Reproducibility.** The ability to consistently replicate the ETL process and its outcomes across different environments, enabled by containerisation.
3. **Development Velocity.** The speed at which changes can be safely integrated and deployed, measured by pipeline execution times.

The architecture of the implemented system itself serves as a visual representation of this framework. **Figure 1** illustrates the flow from code commit through the automated quality gates that constitute the independent construct, ultimately producing a reliable and reproducible artifact.

**Figure 1. Schematic of the CI/CD-enabled ETL pipeline architecture.** This automated workflow acts as a quality gate, preventing defective code from progressing to the deployment artifact stage.

**3. Literature review**

This study is situated at the intersection of three domains. software engineering, data engineering, and the principles of reproducible research.

The DevOps movement, which emerged in the late 2000s, combines software development (Dev) and IT operations (Ops) to shorten the development life cycle and provide continuous delivery with high software quality. Its technical foundation is the CI/CD pipeline, which automates the path from code commit to production deployment through a series of quality gates. Continuous integration involves frequently merging code changes into a central repository, where each merge triggers an automated build and test sequence. Continuous deployment extends this automation to release every change that passes the tests into production. These practices reduce the risk of large, infrequent deployments and provide immediate feedback to developers.

The application of these principles to data engineering, known as DataOps, presents unique challenges. Unlike stateless applications, data pipelines are stateful systems that modify a persistent asset, data. A bug can therefore corrupt downstream datasets, making reversal difficult and time-consuming. This requires that testing for data pipelines include not only unit tests for code logic but also data quality tests that validate the data itself. Frameworks like Great Expectations have emerged to codify these data validation rules, allowing their integration into a CI pipeline. DataOps adapts the core ideas of automation and continuous improvement to the specific challenges of the data lifecycle, with the goal of improving the quality and reducing the cycle time of data analytics.

The need for such a rigorous approach is underscored by the reproducibility crisis in scientific research. Many findings in data-intensive fields have been found difficult or impossible to reproduce, often due to undocumented dependencies, subtle differences in software environments, or unversioned changes to code and data. This study enters the scholarly conversation by demonstrating that DataOps principles, specifically the use of CI/CD pipelines with containerisation, provide a direct and practical solution to this problem within the context of data engineering.

**4. Methodology**

This study adopts a constructive research design to build and evaluate a reproducible CI/CD pipeline for an ETL workflow. All code, configuration files, and test datasets are available in a public GitHub repository to ensure full replicability.

The data acquisition process used synthetic sales data generated and stored in an in-memory SQLite database. This approach was chosen to simulate a realistic e-commerce transaction scenario while ensuring the process was entirely self-contained and perfectly reproducible without external dependencies. The data schema included order\_id, customer\_id, product\_id, quantity, price\_per\_item, and order\_date.

The implementation of the pipeline used a curated set of tools, summarised in **Table 1**. The ETL logic was written in Python 3.11, using the pandas library for data transformation. Pytest was chosen for the testing framework due to its simplicity and powerful fixture model, which facilitates the setup of test conditions. Automated testing was structured in three layers. unit tests to validate transformation logic, integration tests to confirm database connectivity, and data quality tests using Great Expectations to enforce schema and value constraints.

GitHub Actions was selected for CI/CD orchestration because of its tight integration with the source code repository and its declarative, code-based workflow configuration. The workflow was defined in a YAML file to execute the test suite on every commit and pull request. Docker was used for containerisation to create a standardised and reproducible runtime environment, which eliminates inconsistencies between development and production systems. The use of a multi-stage Dockerfile was a specific choice to create a minimal and more secure final image by separating the build environment from the final runtime environment.

**Table 1. Summary of key software components and configuration parameters** | Component | Version | Configuration Details | | :--- | :--- | :--- | | Python | 3.11 | Dockerfile, GitHub Actions matrix | | pandas | 2.x | requirements.txt | | pytest | 7.x | requirements.txt, tests/ | | Great Expectations | 0.17.x | requirements.txt, test\_data\_quality.py | | SQLite | 3.x | In-memory for integration tests | | Docker | 24.x | Multi-stage build, non-root user | | GitHub Actions | v3 | ci-cd.yml |

**5. Results**

The results of the pipeline implementation were assessed based on validation, performance, and data quality outcomes. The automated pipeline executed successfully on multiple commits, with all unit, integration, and data quality tests passing consistently. This confirmed the robustness of the ETL logic and the reliability of the workflow. As shown in **Table 2**, the pipeline achieved a 100% pass rate across all test types, covering 12 unit test cases, 5 integration cases, and 8 data quality checks.

**Table 2. Test coverage and outcomes for ETL pipeline** | Test Type | Number of Cases | Coverage (%) | Pass Rate (%) | | :--- | :--- | :--- | :--- | | Unit (transform) | 12 | 100 | 100 | | Integration (DB) | 5 | 100 | 100 | | Data Quality | 8 | 100 | 100 |

Performance metrics were recorded across five consecutive workflow runs to measure the efficiency of the pipeline. The automated tests completed in under 10 seconds per run. The average Docker image build time was 2.3 minutes, and the image push to Docker Hub completed within 30 seconds after the build. **Figure 2** shows the duration for each stage across the five test runs, illustrating the consistency of the pipeline's performance.

**Figure 2. Bar chart of pipeline stage durations across five workflow runs**

The data quality tests, implemented with Great Expectations, confirmed that all output data met the predefined constraints. As detailed in **Table 3**, zero violations were detected for constraints such as missing product values, negative sales figures, or incorrect date formats. This suggests the transformation logic correctly handles and cleans the data as expected.

**Table 3. Summary of data quality validation results** | Constraint | Violations Detected | Pass Rate (%) | | :--- | :--- | :--- | | No missing product values | 0 | 100 | | Total sales non-negative | 0 | 100 | | Order date format (YYYY-MM-DD) | 0 | 100 |

**6. Discussion**

The results demonstrate that the systematic implementation of a CI/CD pipeline can significantly improve the reliability and reproducibility of ETL workflows. The 100% pass rate across a multi-layered test suite directly supports the conceptual framework's hypothesis that CI/CD practices enhance code reliability. By automating the validation process, the pipeline acts as a safety net that catches regressions before they can impact downstream systems. This directly addresses the research problem of error-prone manual workflows. The combination of rapid test execution (under 10 seconds) and automated containerisation demonstrates that rigorous quality assurance can be integrated without becoming a bottleneck to development velocity.

The successful creation of a consistent Docker artifact in each run confirms the pipeline's contribution to workflow reproducibility. Containerisation guarantees that the code executes in the exact same environment every time, which is a foundational step toward solving the reproducibility crisis in data-intensive work. This finding connects back to the literature, providing a practical method for achieving the reproducible systems called for by researchers.

This study also has limitations. The use of synthetic data, while beneficial for reproducibility, means the pipeline was not tested against the complexities of real-world, messy data sources. The ETL logic itself was simple, and the performance metrics do not reflect the demands of a large-scale data processing job. The test suite, while comprehensive in scope, did not include performance or security testing.

Future research should build on these findings. A clear next step is to apply this framework to a real-world, large-scale data pipeline to measure its impact on production incident rates and team productivity. A comparative study could also evaluate the effectiveness of different data quality frameworks within this CI/CD structure, or explore how the framework could be adapted for different data domains such as streaming analytics.

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