

Strengthening Federal Child Welfare Compliance Through Data Integrity and Continuous Quality Improvement

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ABSTRACT : This study examined the influence of data integrity and continuous quality improvement on federal child welfare compliance in the United States. A survey descriptive research design was adopted for the study. The population consisted of professionals involved in child welfare data management, compliance monitoring, and service delivery, while a sample size of 250 respondents was selected using snowball sampling technique. Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered electronically via Google Forms, and analysed using frequencies, mean, and Spearman Rank Order Correlation at 5% significance level. The findings indicated that: data integrity had a positive and statistically significant influence on federal child welfare compliance in the United States ($\rho = 0.159$; $p = 0.012$); continuous quality improvement had a strong positive and statistically significant influence on federal child welfare compliance in the United States ($\rho = 0.803$; $p = 0.000$). The study concluded that child welfare agencies are more likely to meet federal standards when they maintain accurate, complete, and reliable data systems while also engaging in regular review and improvement of service delivery processes. It was recommended that federal child welfare agencies and state child protection departments should strengthen their data management systems by introducing regular data verification procedures, standardized reporting formats, and periodic staff training on accurate record keeping. This would help improve the accuracy, completeness, and reliability of child welfare records used for compliance monitoring and decision making.

KEYWORDS: *Federal Child Welfare Compliance, Data Integrity, Continuous Quality Improvement*

I. INTRODUCTION

Child welfare systems in the United States were established to safeguard children from abuse, neglect, and exploitation while ensuring that vulnerable children received adequate care, protection, and support (Merkel-Holguin et al., 2021). Over time, the federal government has played a central role in regulating and monitoring how state agencies deliver child welfare services through structured compliance frameworks (Ahn et al., 2017). These frameworks are designed to ensure that states adhere to minimum standards in areas such as child safety, permanency, and well being. Despite these efforts, the system has continued to face persistent challenges, including inconsistent reporting practices, data gaps, and variations in service quality across states, which have been widely linked to weaknesses in administrative data systems and data quality issues (Thompson et al., 2024). The complexity of child welfare operations, combined with the sensitivity of the population served, has made effective monitoring both essential and difficult to achieve. In response, increasing attention has been directed toward improving administrative systems and accountability mechanisms. Within this context, data driven governance has become an important feature of modern child welfare administration, as policymakers seek more reliable ways of understanding performance and outcomes across jurisdictions (Thompson et al., 2025).

Federal Child Welfare Compliance remains a critical component of the United States child protection system because it ensures that states meet established legal and operational standards required to protect children effectively (Burstain et al., 2018). Through federal oversight mechanisms such as the Child and Family Services Reviews, states are assessed on their ability to achieve safety, permanency, and well being outcomes for children in care. This compliance process is important because it promotes accountability, reduces disparities in service delivery, and encourages continuous improvement across child welfare agencies. At the same time, Data Integrity has become increasingly relevant due to the growing reliance on administrative data for decision making, performance evaluation, and policy development (Fallon et al., 2017). Accurate, complete, and reliable data is necessary for understanding trends in child welfare cases, tracking outcomes, and identifying areas that require intervention. Studies have shown that weaknesses in data quality can significantly undermine policy effectiveness and decision making processes in child welfare systems (Thompson et al., 2024). Continuous Quality Improvement also plays a significant role in strengthening service delivery by promoting systematic evaluation of processes and encouraging evidence based adjustments (Zuchowski et al., 2019). It allows agencies

to identify weaknesses in practice and implement corrective measures that improve service effectiveness. However, research has shown that CQI implementation in child welfare has often been inconsistent and still developing across jurisdictions (Burstain et al., 2018). Together, these elements support a more transparent, accountable, and responsive child welfare system, where decisions are informed by accurate information and ongoing evaluation processes rather than assumptions or fragmented reporting.

Data Integrity and Continuous Quality Improvement significantly influence Federal Child Welfare Compliance by shaping how performance is measured, monitored, and improved across child welfare systems (Ahn et al., 2017). When data integrity is strong, the information used to assess compliance accurately reflects actual practice conditions and outcomes. This reduces the risk of misreporting, enhances transparency, and allows federal agencies to make informed judgments about whether states are meeting required standards. Research has shown that variations in data quality across jurisdictions can lead to inconsistent assessments and reduced reliability in evaluating child welfare performance (Thompson et al., 2025). Reliable data also supports early identification of service gaps, enabling timely corrective actions before compliance issues become severe. In contrast, poor data quality can lead to inaccurate assessments, misallocation of resources, and ineffective policy responses (Thompson et al., 2024). Continuous Quality Improvement complements this process by providing a structured approach for using data to drive improvements in service delivery. Studies of CQI in child protection systems have shown that while it has potential to improve practice fidelity and outcomes, its effectiveness depends heavily on proper implementation and strong institutional support (Zuchowski et al., 2019). Through regular assessment, feedback loops, and performance monitoring, CQI enables agencies to refine their practices and align them with federal expectations. It also encourages a culture of learning and accountability within child welfare organizations, where data is not only collected but actively used to improve outcomes for children and families. When combined, Data Integrity and Continuous Quality Improvement strengthen compliance systems by ensuring that evaluations are both accurate and actionable, ultimately improving the overall effectiveness of child welfare services in the United States.

Child welfare systems in the United States are structured to ensure that children who are exposed to abuse, neglect, or unsafe living conditions are protected through timely intervention and appropriate care (Merkel-Holguin et al., 2021). Federal child welfare compliance is intended to guide state agencies in delivering consistent and effective services by enforcing standards that promote child safety, permanency, and overall well being (Ahn et al., 2017). In this arrangement, accurate and reliable data is meant to support decision making, while continuous quality improvement processes are expected to guide regular assessment and refinement of service delivery practices (Zuchowski et al., 2019). Together, these mechanisms are designed to create a system where performance is properly monitored, weaknesses are identified early, and corrective actions are taken in a timely manner to improve outcomes for children and families.

In practice, however, federal child welfare compliance in the United States has continued to face significant challenges (Meyers, 2025). Many state agencies struggle with inconsistent data reporting, incomplete records, and variations in how information is collected and interpreted across jurisdictions, which has been widely associated with broader issues of data integrity and administrative data quality (Thompson et al., 2025). This has made it difficult for federal authorities to accurately assess compliance levels and compare performance across states. In addition, continuous quality improvement processes are not uniformly implemented, and in some cases are applied in a fragmented or superficial manner that limits their effectiveness (Burstain et al., 2018). Studies have also noted that CQI systems often vary widely in implementation quality and institutional support, which affects their impact on service improvement (Zuchowski et al., 2019). As a result, decision making is often based on data that may not fully reflect actual service delivery conditions.

The persistence of these challenges has led to serious consequences for child welfare compliance and service delivery. Inaccurate or incomplete data can result in misleading evaluations of state performance, which may allow systemic problems to go unnoticed for extended periods (Thompson et al., 2024). This weakens accountability and reduces the ability of federal oversight mechanisms to enforce standards effectively. Furthermore, when continuous quality improvement processes are not properly implemented, opportunities to identify and correct service deficiencies are missed, leading to repeated mistakes in practice (Ahn et al., 2017). Eventually, these issues can negatively affect the quality of care provided to vulnerable children, hinder timely interventions, and undermine trust in the child welfare system as a whole. Despite growing attention to data integrity and continuous quality improvement (CQI) in child welfare systems, existing studies reveal important gaps that this study seeks to address. Prior research by Dupra et al. (2026), Fallon et al. (2017), and Ahn et al. (2017) focused mainly on perceptions of data integration, administrative data use, and CQI implementation processes rather than empirically testing their direct influence on federal child welfare compliance outcomes. Similarly, Thompson et al. (2024) and Thompson et al. (2025) emphasized data quality issues and variability in administrative systems but did not examine how data integrity translates into compliance performance at the federal level. Studies by Zuchowski et al. (2019) and Burstain et al. (2018) explored CQI effectiveness in child protection settings, yet they largely concentrated on program improvement rather than regulatory compliance outcomes. Schilder et al. (2022), Merkel-Holguin et al. (2021), and Critcholin (2014) further highlighted

structural, systemic, and implementation challenges in child welfare systems but did not quantitatively link CQI or data integrity to compliance enforcement. Consequently, there remains a clear empirical gap in understanding the combined effect of data integrity and CQI on federal child welfare compliance, particularly using inferential statistical methods such as correlation analysis within a unified analytical framework. Thus, the main aim of the study is to examine the influence of data integrity and continuous quality improvement on federal child welfare compliance. However, the research questions are:

- i. To what extent does data integrity influence federal child welfare compliance in the United States?
- ii. To what degree does continuous quality improvement influence federal child welfare compliance in the United States?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Synthesis of Existing Empirical Studies

The empirical literature on data integrity and continuous quality improvement within child welfare systems presents a consistent but complex picture of how these factors relate to compliance and service outcomes. A central theme across studies is the growing recognition of data quality as a foundation for effective child welfare governance. Thompson et al. (2024) emphasized that poor quality data continues to undermine decision making, weaken policy development, and reduce the reliability of child welfare outcomes. In the same direction, Dupra et al. (2026) found that while stakeholders strongly acknowledged the importance of integrated and reliable data systems, such recognition did not automatically translate into improved policy or child protection outcomes. Their regression findings showed no significant influence of awareness or attitudes on system effectiveness, suggesting that structural and institutional limitations may weaken the practical impact of data systems. Similarly, Thompson et al. (2025) observed that although administrative child maltreatment data is generally moderate to good in quality, significant inconsistencies exist across agencies and regions, which raises concerns about the reliability of compliance assessments at the federal level.

Further evidence suggests that these weaknesses in data systems directly affect how child welfare compliance is monitored and achieved. Fallon et al. (2017) demonstrated that when administrative data is properly analyzed and used in collaborative partnerships, it improves understanding of service patterns and supports better decision making. However, they also highlighted that such benefits depend heavily on the quality and usability of the data available. This aligns with Thompson et al. (2024), who argued that poor data quality slows research progress and weakens the overall effectiveness of child welfare systems. Taken together, these studies suggest that data integrity does not operate in isolation but is deeply influenced by institutional capacity, coordination between agencies, and the ability to translate data into actionable compliance processes. Therefore, while data integrity is widely recognized as important, its actual influence on federal child welfare compliance appears to depend on broader systemic conditions rather than awareness alone.

In relation to continuous quality improvement, the empirical findings also show mixed but generally positive expectations of its role in child welfare systems. Zuchowski et al. (2019) found that Continuous Quality Improvement has potential to improve service delivery, particularly through improved implementation fidelity, although evidence supporting its effectiveness remains limited and methodologically weak. Burstain et al. (2018) further explained that CQI is conceptually strong but still underdeveloped in practice within child welfare agencies, as many systems remain in transition from traditional compliance based models to improvement oriented frameworks. Their case study highlighted that successful CQI implementation requires strong organizational commitment and clear structural alignment. Similarly, Ahn et al. (2017) found that revised CQI models that integrate broader outcome measures beyond compliance can improve understanding of child welfare performance and support more informed decision making. These findings suggest that CQI has the potential to strengthen compliance systems, but its effectiveness depends on how deeply it is embedded within agency operations.

However, other studies reveal that CQI implementation is often uneven and influenced by contextual and structural factors. Schilder et al. (2022) showed that although quality improvement systems can enhance practice through coaching, training, and structured feedback, challenges such as inconsistent implementation and concerns about measurement accuracy can limit their effectiveness. Critchisin (2014) further illustrated that participant engagement in quality improvement systems often depends on empowerment, communication, and alignment of incentives, and that breakdowns in these areas can weaken overall system effectiveness. Merkel-Holguin et al. (2021) also highlighted that long standing structural issues within child welfare systems, including policies and procedures that produce unintended negative consequences, continue to limit the impact of reform efforts. These findings collectively suggest that while CQI is designed to enhance compliance and service quality, its actual influence is shaped by structural realities that may either support or constrain its effectiveness.

In all, the synthesis of empirical evidence indicates that both data integrity and continuous quality improvement are widely acknowledged as important drivers of child welfare performance, yet their influence on federal compliance is not straightforward. Studies consistently show that although these factors are associated with improved decision making and service delivery, their effectiveness is often moderated by institutional

capacity, implementation consistency, and systemic barriers. Thompson et al. (2024) and Dupra et al. (2026) particularly highlight the limitations of data systems in translating quality information into improved outcomes, while Zuchowski et al. (2019) and Burstain et al. (2018) emphasize the gap between CQI theory and practice. This suggests that the relationship between data integrity, CQI, and federal child welfare compliance is influenced not only by technical systems but also by organizational readiness and structural conditions within the child welfare environment.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on Systems Theory which was developed by Ludwig von Bertalanffy in 1968 as a way of understanding how different parts of a whole interact with one another to produce overall outcomes (Von Bertalanffy, 1972). The theory emerged as a response to reductionist approaches that studied phenomena in isolation without considering the relationships between components. According to Hofkirchner and Schafranek (2011), Bertalanffy introduced it under General Systems Theory, arguing that complex structures such as biological, social, and organisational systems should be understood as interconnected wholes rather than separate parts. Over time, the theory has been widely applied in various disciplines including management, health, education, and social services due to its ability to explain complex interactions within structured environments (Caws, 2015).

The main postulation of Systems Theory is that every system is made up of interdependent components that work together to achieve a common purpose (Lai & Lin, 2017). A change in one part of the system affects the functioning of other parts, meaning that no element operates in isolation. The theory also emphasizes inputs, processes, outputs, and feedback mechanisms that help a system adjust and improve over time. Feedback is particularly important because it allows systems to identify errors, make corrections, and maintain stability. In addition, Systems Theory suggests that the effectiveness of any system depends on the quality of interactions among its components, the flow of information, and the ability to adapt to internal and external changes (Ruben, 2018; Whitney et al., 2015).

Systems Theory is highly relevant to this study because federal child welfare compliance operates as an interconnected system involving data integrity, continuous quality improvement processes, state agencies, and federal oversight bodies. Data integrity represents the input quality of the system (Duggineni, 2023), while continuous quality improvement represents the feedback and adjustment mechanism used to refine processes and improve outcomes (Lavelle et al., 2015). Federal compliance reflects the output, which shows whether the system is functioning effectively in protecting children and meeting required standards. When data is inaccurate or incomplete, it disrupts the entire system by leading to poor decisions and weak compliance outcomes. Similarly, when continuous quality improvement processes are not effectively implemented, the system loses its ability to learn and improve. Therefore, Systems Theory provides a useful explanation of how the interaction between data integrity and continuous quality improvement influences the effectiveness of federal child welfare compliance in the United States.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a survey descriptive research design. The choice of this design was informed by its suitability for collecting and describing data from a defined group of respondents without manipulating any of the study variables. It is considered appropriate for examining opinions, perceptions, and experiences of professionals regarding the influence of data integrity and continuous quality improvement on federal child welfare compliance in the United States. The design also allows for the collection of quantitative data that can be statistically analysed to determine relationships among variables within the study context (Oyewole, 2026; Okafor & Nworie, 2025). The population of the study comprised professionals directly involved in child welfare data management, compliance monitoring, and service delivery within child protection agencies in the United States. These professionals include child welfare caseworkers, data management officers, quality assurance personnel, continuous quality improvement coordinators, and compliance officers. This population was considered appropriate because they are directly engaged in processes related to data collection, monitoring, evaluation, and reporting, which are central to federal child welfare compliance systems. Their experiences and perceptions provide relevant and reliable information for assessing the influence of data integrity and continuous quality improvement on compliance outcomes. The sample size for the study was 250 professionals drawn from the population of interest. This sample size was considered adequate to provide sufficient representation and ensure meaningful statistical analysis. A snowball sampling technique was employed to select respondents. This technique was adopted because professionals involved in child welfare compliance and data systems are often distributed across different agencies and locations, making it difficult to access them through a single sampling frame. In this approach, initially identified respondents assisted in referring other eligible participants within their professional networks until the required sample size was achieved. This method helped to reach participants who might otherwise have been difficult to access.

Data for the study were collected using a structured questionnaire designed in line with the research objectives and questions. The questionnaire was divided into sections covering demographic information and items measuring data integrity, continuous quality improvement, and federal child welfare compliance. Responses were measured using a five point Likert scale consisting of very high extent, high extent, neutral, low extent, and very low extent. The questionnaire was administered electronically using Google Forms to facilitate wider reach, ease of response, and efficient data collection across different locations. The use of an electronic questionnaire also helped to ensure timely completion and reduced the cost associated with physical distribution.

The data collected were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Frequencies and mean scores were used to present and summarise respondents' views on each research item. This helped to describe the general perception of professionals regarding the extent to which data integrity and continuous quality improvement influence federal child welfare compliance. In addition, Spearman Rank Order Correlation was used to test the two research questions at a 5 percent level of significance. This non parametric test was considered appropriate because the data were measured on an ordinal scale and the study aimed to determine the strength and direction of relationships between variables.

Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before they were included in the study, and they were adequately informed about the purpose of the research and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Confidentiality and anonymity of respondents were maintained by ensuring that no personal identifiers were collected or disclosed in the analysis or reporting of findings. Participation was voluntary, and all data collected were used strictly for academic purposes. These measures were taken to ensure compliance with ethical standards in social science research and to protect the rights and privacy of all respondents.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

Table 4.1 presents the descriptive analysis of respondents' opinions on data integrity, continuous quality improvement, and federal child welfare compliance in the United States. The table shows the frequency distribution and mean scores of responses obtained from professionals involved in child welfare data management, compliance monitoring, and service delivery. In the table, VHE represents Very High Extent, HE represents High Extent, LE represents Low Extent, and VLE represents Very Low Extent.

Table 4.1 Descriptive Analysis

S/N	Data Integrity	VHE (5)	HE (4)	Neutral (3)	LE (2)	VLE (1)	Mean
1	Data collected in our agency are accurate and free from errors	71	113	40	10	16	3.85
2	Child welfare records are consistently updated and reliable	99	66	42	0	43	3.71
3	Information entered into the system reflects actual case conditions	45	137	0	32	36	3.49
4	Our agency ensures completeness of child welfare data before reporting	84	113	41	12	0	4.08
5	Data validation processes reduce errors in child welfare reporting	36	131	0	47	36	3.34
S/N	Continuous Quality Improvement	VHE (5)	HE (4)	Neutral (3)	LE (2)	VLE (1)	Mean
6	Our agency regularly reviews child welfare practices for improvement	162	47	18	0	23	4.30
7	Feedback from monitoring processes is used to improve service delivery	70	158	6	0	16	4.06
8	Staff receive regular training based on CQI findings	65	122	0	21	42	3.59

9	Performance data is used to guide decision making in child welfare services	68	118	36	28	0	3.90
10	CQI processes help identify gaps in child welfare service delivery	106	105	23	16	0	4.20
S/N	Federal Child Welfare Compliance	VHE (5)	HE (4)	Neutral (3)	LE (2)	VLE (1)	Mean
11	Our agency complies with federal child welfare reporting standards	36	131	0	47	36	3.34
12	Federal compliance requirements are properly implemented in our agency	162	47	18	0	23	4.30
13	Our agency meets federal expectations on child safety and protection outcomes	70	158	6	0	16	4.06
14	Compliance audits reflect accurate performance of our child welfare services	65	122	0	21	42	3.59
15	Federal compliance monitoring has improved accountability in our agency	68	118	36	28	0	3.90

Source: Fiel Survey (2026)

Table 4.1 presents the descriptive analysis of respondents' views on data integrity, continuous quality improvement, and federal child welfare compliance in the United States. Regarding whether data collected in the agency are accurate and free from errors, the table shows that 113 respondents indicated high extent, while 71 respondents indicated very high extent. In contrast, 10 respondents indicated low extent and 16 respondents indicated very low extent, while 40 respondents remained neutral. The mean score of 3.85 indicates that respondents generally agreed that data collected within their agencies are accurate and reliable.

On whether child welfare records are consistently updated and reliable, Table 4.1 shows that 99 respondents selected very high extent and 66 selected high extent. Also, 42 respondents were neutral, while 43 respondents indicated very low extent. The mean score of 3.71 suggests that most respondents believed that child welfare records are regularly updated and dependable, although some concerns still exist among a portion of respondents.

The table further reveals that 137 respondents indicated high extent and 45 indicated very high extent regarding whether information entered into the system reflects actual case conditions. However, 32 respondents selected low extent and 36 selected very low extent. The mean score of 3.49 shows moderate agreement among respondents that the information entered into child welfare systems reflects real case situations.

Concerning completeness of child welfare data before reporting, 113 respondents selected high extent and 84 selected very high extent. Also, 41 respondents were neutral while 12 respondents indicated low extent. No respondent selected very low extent. The mean score of 4.08 indicates strong agreement that agencies ensure completeness of child welfare data before reporting activities are carried out.

Table 4.1 also shows that 131 respondents indicated high extent and 36 indicated very high extent on whether data validation processes reduce errors in child welfare reporting. On the other hand, 47 respondents selected low extent and 36 selected very low extent. The mean score of 3.34 suggests that respondents moderately agreed that data validation processes help reduce reporting errors within child welfare systems. With respect to continuous quality improvement, Table 4.1 reveals that 162 respondents selected very high extent and 47 selected high extent regarding regular review of child welfare practices for improvement purposes. Also, 18 respondents remained neutral while 23 selected very low extent. The mean score of 4.30 indicates a strong perception among

respondents that agencies regularly review child welfare practices to improve service delivery.

On whether feedback from monitoring processes is used to improve service delivery, 158 respondents selected high extent and 70 selected very high extent. In comparison, 16 respondents selected very low extent while 6 respondents were neutral. The mean score of 4.06 shows that respondents generally believed that monitoring feedback contributes positively to service improvement within child welfare agencies. Regarding staff training based on CQI findings, 122 respondents indicated high extent and 65 indicated very high extent. However, 21 respondents selected low extent and 42 selected very low extent. The mean score of 3.59 reflects moderate agreement that staff members receive regular training informed by CQI findings. The table also indicates that 118 respondents selected high extent and 68 selected very high extent concerning the use of performance data in decision making within child welfare services. Additionally, 36 respondents were neutral while 28 respondents indicated low extent. The mean score of 3.90 suggests that respondents generally agreed that performance data is used in guiding decisions in child welfare services.

On whether CQI processes help identify gaps in child welfare service delivery, 106 respondents selected very high extent and 105 selected high extent. Also, 23 respondents remained neutral while 16 respondents selected low extent. The mean score of 4.20 indicates strong agreement that CQI processes are useful in identifying weaknesses and service gaps within child welfare systems.

In relation to federal child welfare compliance, Table 4.1 shows that 131 respondents selected high extent and 36 selected very high extent regarding compliance with federal child welfare reporting standards. However, 47 respondents selected low extent and 36 selected very low extent. The mean score of 3.34 indicates moderate agreement that agencies comply with federal reporting standards.

Concerning proper implementation of federal compliance requirements, 162 respondents selected very high extent and 47 selected high extent. Also, 18 respondents were neutral while 23 respondents selected very low extent. The mean score of 4.30 suggests that respondents strongly believed that federal compliance requirements are properly implemented within their agencies. The table further shows that 158 respondents selected high extent and 70 selected very high extent regarding whether agencies meet federal expectations on child safety and protection outcomes. Only 16 respondents selected very low extent while 6 respondents remained neutral. The mean score of 4.06 indicates that respondents generally agreed that agencies meet federal child welfare expectations. Regarding whether compliance audits reflect accurate performance of child welfare services, 122 respondents selected high extent and 65 selected very high extent. Meanwhile, 21 respondents selected low extent and 42 selected very low extent. The mean score of 3.59 reflects moderate agreement among respondents that compliance audits accurately represent agency performance.

Finally, Table 4.1 reveals that 118 respondents selected high extent and 68 selected very high extent concerning whether federal compliance monitoring has improved service accountability in their agencies. Also, 36 respondents remained neutral while 28 respondents selected low extent. The mean score of 3.90 suggests that respondents generally believed that federal compliance monitoring has contributed positively to accountability in child welfare service delivery.

4.1 Analysis of Research Question I

i. To what extent does data integrity influence federal child welfare compliance in the United States?

Table 4.2 Analysis of Research Question I

Federal Child Welfare Compliance

Spearman's rho	Data Integrity	Correlation Coefficient	.159*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.012
		N	250

Source: SPSS V. 26 Output (2026)

Table 4.2 presents the analysis of Research Question I, which examined the extent to which data integrity influences federal child welfare compliance in the United States using Spearman's rho correlation analysis. The table shows a correlation coefficient of 0.159, indicating a positive marginal influence of data integrity on federal child welfare compliance. This means that improvements in data integrity are associated with corresponding improvements in federal child welfare compliance, although the strength of the influence is weak. The significance value of 0.012 is less than the 0.05 level of significance, indicating that the influence is statistically significant at the 5 percent level. Therefore, the result suggests that data integrity significantly influences federal child welfare compliance in the United States.

4.2 Analysis of Research Question II

ii. To what degree does continuous quality improvement influence federal child welfare compliance in the United States?

Table 4.3 Analysis of Research Question II

			Federal Child Welfare Compliance
Spearman's rho	Continuous Improvement	Quality Correlation Coefficient	.803**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
		N	250

Source: SPSS V. 26 Output (2026)

Table 4.3 presents the analysis of Research Question II, which examined the degree to which continuous quality improvement influences federal child welfare compliance in the United States. The table reveals a correlation coefficient of 0.803, showing a strong positive influence of continuous quality improvement on federal child welfare compliance. This implies that increases in continuous quality improvement practices are associated with substantial improvements in federal child welfare compliance. The significance value of 0.000 is less than the 0.05 level of significance, indicating that the influence is statistically significant at the 5 percent level. Therefore, the result indicates that continuous quality improvement significantly influences federal child welfare compliance in the United States.

4.3 Discussion of Findings

The finding that data integrity had a positive and statistically significant influence on federal child welfare compliance in the United States suggests that accurate, complete, and reliable data systems contribute to better compliance monitoring and reporting within child welfare agencies. This result may be because federal child welfare compliance depends heavily on accurate case documentation, timely reporting, and dependable administrative records used in evaluating agency performance. When agencies maintain reliable data systems, they are more capable of identifying service gaps, monitoring child outcomes, and meeting federal reporting requirements effectively. This finding is consistent with Thompson et al. (2025), who found that data quality dimensions such as accuracy, consistency, completeness, and timeliness were important in strengthening administrative data systems across child welfare agencies. The result also agrees with Thompson et al. (2024), who explained that poor data quality weakens decision making, reduces resource efficiency, and affects child welfare outcomes negatively. Fallon et al. (2017) further supported this position by emphasizing the usefulness of administrative data in informing service delivery and improving child welfare decision making. Similarly, Ahn et al. (2017) observed that improved data systems enhanced understanding of statewide performance outcomes and supported quality assurance processes. However, the weak strength of the influence may be linked to the concerns raised by Dupra et al. (2026), whose findings showed that although stakeholders valued data integration, awareness and perceived benefits alone did not significantly improve policy development or child protection outcomes due to implementation challenges and weak institutional coordination. Merkel- Holguin et al. (2021) also suggested that structural problems within child welfare systems may continue to limit the effectiveness of administrative reforms despite efforts to improve accountability mechanisms.

The finding that continuous quality improvement had a strong positive and statistically significant influence on federal child welfare compliance in the United States indicates that agencies with stronger review systems, performance monitoring practices, and service evaluation procedures are more likely to comply with federal child welfare standards. This result may be because continuous quality improvement encourages regular assessment of agency practices, identification of weaknesses, staff development, and evidence based adjustments that strengthen accountability and service delivery. The finding is strongly supported by Zuchowski et al. (2019), who found that CQI approaches showed potential for improving implementation fidelity and enhancing service delivery within child protection systems. The result also agrees with Burstain et al. (2018), who explained that CQI systems help agencies move beyond traditional quality assurance practices toward more effective monitoring and improvement frameworks. Ahn et al. (2017) similarly reported that revised CQI models improved understanding of aggregate child welfare data and helped identify factors influencing outcomes for children and families. Schilder et al. (2022) also found that quality improvement systems supported improvements in instructional practices, learning environments, and staff development through coaching and monitoring processes. In addition, Critchosin (2014) observed that quality improvement systems enhanced participant engagement and encouraged better organizational practices through empowerment and continuous support structures. Nevertheless, Zuchowski et al. (2019) noted that although CQI had promising outcomes, many studies still lacked strong validating evidence, suggesting that the effectiveness of CQI may vary depending on implementation quality and institutional commitment.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The findings of this study showed that both data integrity and continuous quality improvement play important roles in strengthening federal child welfare compliance in the United States. The positive and significant influence observed suggests that child welfare agencies are more likely to meet federal standards when they maintain accurate, complete, and reliable data systems while also engaging in regular review and improvement of service delivery processes. This means that the quality of information available within child welfare agencies affects how effectively compliance activities are monitored, evaluated, and reported. Where records are accurate and consistently updated, agencies are better positioned to track child outcomes, monitor performance, and respond to compliance requirements in a timely manner. In the same manner, the strong positive influence of continuous quality improvement reflects the importance of regular assessment, feedback mechanisms, staff development, and performance monitoring within child welfare systems. The findings further indicate that compliance with federal child welfare standards is not dependent on regulations alone, but also on the ability of agencies to build reliable administrative systems and maintain a culture of ongoing evaluation and accountability. The results also point to the need for stronger coordination between data management practices and service improvement processes within child welfare agencies. In addition, the findings suggest that weaknesses in data handling or inconsistent quality improvement practices may reduce the effectiveness of compliance monitoring and limit the ability of agencies to provide timely and effective services for vulnerable children and families.

The study recommended the following:

1. Federal child welfare agencies and state child protection departments should strengthen their data management systems by introducing regular data verification procedures, standardized reporting formats, and periodic staff training on accurate record keeping. This would help improve the accuracy, completeness, and reliability of child welfare records used for compliance monitoring and decision making. Since the findings showed that data integrity significantly influences federal child welfare compliance, improving data quality practices would support more accurate assessments of agency performance and reduce errors that may affect compliance reporting and service delivery outcomes.

- a. Administrators and continuous quality improvement coordinators within child welfare agencies should establish regular performance review sessions, feedback mechanisms, and staff development programmes that encourage ongoing evaluation of child welfare practices. Agencies should also ensure that performance data gathered from monitoring activities are consistently used to identify service gaps and improve operational processes. This is important because the findings revealed that continuous quality improvement strongly influences federal child welfare compliance, indicating that agencies with stronger improvement systems are more likely to meet federal standards and maintain accountability in service delivery. Contribution to Knowledge This study contributes to existing literature by addressing key gaps identified in previous research on data integrity, continuous quality improvement, and child welfare systems. While studies by Dupra et al. (2026), Fallon et al. (2017), and Ahn et al. (2017) focused mainly on perceptions of data integration, administrative data use, and CQI implementation processes, they did not empirically test how these factors influence federal child welfare compliance outcomes. In the same way, Thompson et al. (2024) and Thompson et al. (2025) examined issues of data quality and variations in administrative systems but stopped short of linking data integrity directly to compliance performance at the federal level. Research by Zuchowski et al. (2019) and Burstain et al. (2018) highlighted the potential of CQI in improving child welfare practice, yet their focus remained largely on program improvement rather than compliance enforcement outcomes. Furthermore, Schilder et al. (2022), Merkel-Holguin et al. (2021), and Critchisin (2014) provided useful insights into structural and implementation challenges within child welfare systems, but they did not establish quantitative relationships between CQI, data integrity, and compliance effectiveness. This study therefore fills these gaps by empirically examining the combined influence of data integrity and continuous quality improvement on federal child welfare compliance in the United States using inferential statistical analysis.

b. Limitations of the Study and Suggestion for Further Studies

This study was limited by the use of snowball sampling, which may not fully represent all professionals involved in child welfare compliance across the United States. Since participants were selected through referrals, some groups of workers may have been overrepresented while others were not reached. The study also relied on self-reported responses from questionnaires, which may be affected by personal opinions or bias. In addition, the cross-sectional design captured information at a single point in time, so changes over time were not considered. These factors may affect how widely the findings can be applied to all child welfare agencies. Future studies should consider using a larger and more representative sample that covers different states and child welfare agencies in the United States. Random sampling methods can also be used to reduce bias and improve generalization of results. Researchers may include qualitative methods such as interviews to gain deeper understanding of how data integrity and continuous quality improvement affect compliance in real practice. Longitudinal studies are also recommended to observe changes over time and provide stronger evidence of cause and effect. Further studies can also examine other factors that may influence federal child welfare compliance alongside these variables.

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