E- Global Congress
Hosted online from Dubai, U. A. E., E - Conference.
Date: 29th August 2024
Website: https://eglobalcongress.com/index.php/egc
ISSN (E): 2836-3612

UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPT OF LIMITS IN MATHEMATICS: A FUNDAMENTAL BUILDING BLOCK IN CALCULUS

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Annotation:
The article provides a comprehensive introduction to the concept of limits, which is essential in calculus. It explains the basic idea of a limit, where a function approaches a particular value as the input approaches a certain point. The article covers different types of limits, including finite limits, infinite limits, and limits at infinity, and introduces key properties such as uniqueness, limit laws, continuity, and the Squeeze Theorem. Additionally, it highlights the practical applications of limits in fields like physics, economics, and engineering, emphasizing their importance in understanding and modeling real-world phenomena. The article serves as a clear and accessible guide for students and professionals looking to deepen their understanding of calculus.

Keywords: Limit, Calculus, Finite Limits, Infinite Limits, Limits at Infinity, Limit Laws, Continuity, Squeeze Theorem, Uniqueness, Function Behaviour, Real-world Applications, Mathematical Analysis, Calculus Fundamentals.

The concept of a limit is one of the cornerstones of calculus, a branch of mathematics that deals with change and motion. Limits help us understand how functions behave as they approach a particular point or as their input values grow larger without bound. Though the idea may seem abstract, limits have profound implications in various fields of science and engineering.

At its core, a limit describes the value that a function approaches as the input (or independent variable) approaches a certain value. For example, if we consider a function \(f(x) \), the limit of \(f(x) \) as \(x \) approaches some number \(c \) is the value that \(f(x) \) gets closer to as \(x \) gets closer to \(c \). We write this as:

\[\lim_{{x \to c}} f(x) = L\]

Here, \(L \) is the value that the function approaches. If the function reaches or surpasses this value exactly when \(x = c \), then \(L = f(c) \). However, it's crucial to note that the limit of a function as \(x \) approaches \(c \) doesn't

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necessarily equal the value of the function at \(c \). The behaviour near the point is what's essential.

We will look at types of Limits:

1. Finite Limits:

This is the most straightforward type, where a function approaches a specific finite number as the input approaches a particular value. For example:

\[\lim_{{x \to 2}} (3x + 1) = 7 \]

As \(x \) gets closer to 2, the value of \(3x + 1 \) gets closer to 7.

2. Infinite Limits:

Sometimes, as the input approaches a certain value, the function may grow without bound, either positively or negatively. This is called an infinite limit. For instance:

\[\lim_{{x \to 0^+}} \frac{1}{x} = +\infty \]

Here, as \(x \) approaches 0 from the right (denoted \(0^+ \)), the function \(\frac{1}{x} \) increases indefinitely.

3. Limits at Infinity:

These describe the behaviour of functions as the input value becomes infinitely large or small. For example:

\[\lim_{{x \to \infty}} \frac{1}{x} = 0\]

As \(x \) grows larger, \(\frac{1}{x} \) approaches 0.

We will look at Properties of Limits:

1. Uniqueness:

If the limit of a function exists as \(x \) approaches a particular value, it must be unique. There can't be two different numbers that the function approaches simultaneously as the input approaches the same value.

2. Limit Laws:

Several laws help us compute limits more easily:

- Sum Law:

\(\lim_{{x \to c}} [f(x) + g(x)] = \lim_{{x \to c}} f(x) + \lim_{{x \to c}} g(x) \)

- Difference Law:

\(\lim_{{x \to c}} [f(x) - g(x)] = \lim_{{x \to c}} f(x) - \lim_{{x \to c}} g(x) \)

- Product Law:

\(\lim_{{x \to c}} [f(x) \cdot g(x)] = \lim_{{x \to c}} f(x) \cdot \lim_{{x \to c}} g(x) \)

- Quotient Law:

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$\lim_{{x \to c}} \frac{f(x)}{g(x)} = \frac{\lim_{{x \to c}} f(x)}{\lim_{{x \to c}} g(x)}$, provided $\lim_{{x \to c}} g(x) \neq 0$.

- Power Law:

$\lim_{{x \to c}} [f(x)]^n = \left(\lim_{{x \to c}} f(x)\right)^n$ for any positive integer n.

3. Continuity:

A function $f(x)$ is said to be continuous at a point c if the following three conditions are met:

- $f(c)$ is defined.
- $\lim_{{x \to c}} f(x)$ exists.
- $\lim_{{x \to c}} f(x) = f(c)$.

Continuity implies that the function has no breaks, jumps, or holes at that point.

4. Squeeze Theorem:

If a function $f(x)$ is squeezed between two other functions $g(x)$ and $h(x)$, and if the limits of $g(x)$ and $h(x)$ as x approaches some value c are equal, then the limit of $f(x)$ as x approaches c will be the same as that of $g(x)$ and $h(x)$.

$$\text{If } g(x) \leq f(x) \leq h(x) \text{ and } \lim_{{x \to c}} g(x) = \lim_{{x \to c}} h(x) = L, \text{ then } \lim_{{x \to c}} f(x) = L.$$

The concept of limits is not just theoretical; it has practical applications in many areas. For instance:

- Physics:

In kinematics, the velocity of an object is the limit of its average speed as the time interval becomes infinitesimally small.

- Economics:

Limits are used in marginal analysis, where the marginal cost or revenue is the limit of the change in cost or revenue as production changes by one unit.

- Engineering:

Engineers use limits to model the behaviour of materials and systems as they approach certain stress levels or operating conditions.

Understanding limits is essential for mastering calculus and appreciating its applications in real-world problems. The concept provides a rigorous way to deal with quantities that approach specific values, whether finite or infinite. By grasping the properties and rules governing limits, students and professionals

ISSN (E): 2836-3612

alike can unlock a deeper understanding of the continuous processes that underpin much of science and engineering.

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