Axis 8: Index Numbers

I. Meaning of Index Numbers:

The value of money does not remain constant over time. It rises or falls and is inversely related to the changes in the price level. A rise in the price level means a fall in the value of money and a fall in the price level means a rise in the value of money. Thus, changes in the value of money are reflected by the changes in the general level of prices over a period of time. Changes in the general level of prices can be measured by a statistical device known as 'index number.'

Index number is a technique of measuring changes in a variable or group of variables with respect to time, geographical location or other characteristics. There can be various types of index numbers, but, in the present context, we are concerned with price index numbers, which measures changes in the general price level (or in the value of money) over a period of time.

Price index number indicates the average of changes in the prices of representative commodities at one time in comparison with that at some other time taken as the base period. According to L.V. Lester, "An index number of prices is a figure showing the height of average prices at one time relative to their height at some other time which is taken as the base period."

II. Features of Index Numbers:

The following are the main features of index numbers:

(i) Index numbers are meant to study the changes in the effects of such factors which cannot be measured directly. For example, the general price level is an imaginary concept and is not capable of direct measurement. But, through the technique of index numbers, it is possible to have an idea of relative changes in the general level of prices by measuring relative changes in the price level of different commodities.

(ii) The technique of index numbers measures changes in one variable or group of related variables. For example, one variable can be the price of wheat, and group of variables can be the price of sugar, the price of milk and the price of rice.

(iii) The technique of index numbers is used to compare the levels of a phenomenon on a certain date with its level on some previous date (e.g., the price level in 1980 as compared to that in 1960 taken as the base year) or the levels of a phenomenon at different places on the same date (e.g., the price level in India in 1980 in comparison with that in other countries in 1980).

The construction of the price index numbers involves the following steps or problems:

1. Selection of Base Year:

The first step or the problem in preparing the index numbers is the selection of the base year. The base year is defined as that year with reference to which the price

changes in other years are compared and expressed as percentages. The base year should be a normal year.

In other words, it should be free from abnormal conditions like wars, famines, floods, political instability, etc. Base year can be selected in two ways- (a) through fixed base method in which the base year remains fixed; and (b) through chain base method in which the base year goes on changing, e.g., for 1980 the base year will be 1979, for 1979 it will be 1978, and so on.

2. Selection of Commodities:

The second problem in the construction of index numbers is the selection of the commodities. Since all commodities cannot be included, only representative commodities should be selected keeping in view the purpose and type of the index number.

In selecting items, the following points are to be kept in mind:

(a) The items should be representative of the tastes, habits and customs of the people.

(b) Items should be recognizable,

(c) Items should be stable in quality over two different periods and places.

(d) The economic and social importance of various items should be considered

(e) The items should be fairly large in number.

(f) All those varieties of a commodity which are in common use and are stable in character should be included.

3. Collection of Prices:

After selecting the commodities, the next problem is regarding the collection of their prices:

(a) From where the prices to be collected;

(b) Whether to choose wholesale prices or retail prices;

(c) Whether to include taxes in the prices or not etc.

While collecting prices, the following points are to be noted:

(a) Prices are to be collected from those places where a particular commodity is traded in large quantities.

(b) Published information regarding the prices should also be utilised,

(c) In selecting individuals and institutions who would supply price quotations, care should be taken that they are not biased.

(d) Selection of wholesale or retail prices depends upon the type of index number to be prepared. Wholesale prices are used in the construction of general price index and retail prices are used in the construction of cost-of-living index number.

(e) Prices collected from various places should be averaged.

4. Selection of Average:

Since the index numbers are, a specialised average, the fourth problem is to choose a suitable average. Theoretically, geometric mean is the best for this purpose. But, in practice, arithmetic mean is used because it is easier to follow.

5. Selection of Weights:

Generally, all the commodities included in the construction' of index numbers are not of equal importance. Therefore, if the index numbers are to be representative, proper weights should be assigned to the commodities according to their relative importance.

For example, the prices of books will be given more weightage while preparing the cost-of-living index for teachers than while preparing the cost-of-living index for the workers. Weights should be unbiased and be rationally and not arbitrarily selected.

6. Purpose of Index Numbers:

The most important consideration in the construction of the index numbers is the objective of the index numbers. All other problems or steps are to be viewed in the light of the purpose for which a particular index number is to be prepared. Since, different index numbers are prepared with specific purposes and no single index number is 'all purpose' index number, it is important to be clear about the purpose of the index number before its construction.

7. Selection of Method:

The selection of a suitable method for the construction of index numbers is the final step.

There are two methods of computing the index numbers:

(a) Simple index number and

(b) Weighted index number.

Simple index number again can be constructed either by – (i) Simple aggregate method, or by (ii) simple average of price relative's method. Similarly, weighted index number can be constructed either by (i) weighted aggregative method, or by (ii) weighted average of price relative's method. The choice of method depends upon the availability of data, degree of accuracy required and the purpose of the study.

III. Construction of Price Index Numbers (Formula and Examples):

Construction of price index numbers through various methods can be understood with the help of the following examples:

1. Simple Aggregative Method:

In this method, the index number is equal to the sum of prices for the year for which index number is to be found divided by the sum of actual prices for the base year.

The formula for finding the index number through this method is as follows:

$$P_{01} = \frac{\Sigma P_1}{\Sigma P_0} \times 100$$

Where P_{01} Stands for the index number

ΣP_1 Stands for the sum of the prices for the year for which index number is to be found :

ΣP_0 Stands for the sum of prices for the base year.

Commodity	Prices in Base Year 1980 (in Rs.) P_o	Prices in current Year 1988 (in Rs.) P_1
A	10	20
B	15	25
C	40	60
D	25	40
Total	$\Sigma P_0 = 90$	$\Sigma P_1 = 145$

Index Number $(P_{01}) = \frac{\Sigma P_1}{\Sigma P_0} \times 100$; $P_{01} = \frac{145}{90} \times 100$; $P_{01} = 161.11$

2. Simple Average of Price Relatives Method:

In this method, the index number is equal to the sum of price relatives divided by the number of items and is calculated by using the following formula:

$$P_{01} = \frac{\Sigma R}{N}$$

Where ΣR stands for the sum of price relatives i. e. $R = \frac{P_1}{P_0} \times 100$ and

N stands for the number of items.

Example

Commodity P_0	Base Year Prices (in Rs.) P_1	Current year Prices (in Rs.)	Price Relatives $R = \frac{P_1}{P_0} \times 100$
A	10	20	$\frac{20}{10} \times 100 = 200.0$
B	15	25	$\frac{25}{15} \times 100 = 166.7$
C	40	60	$\frac{60}{40} \times 100 = 150.00$
D	25	40	$\frac{40}{25} \times 100 = 160.0$
N = 4			$\Sigma R = 676.7$

$$\text{Index Number } (p_{01}) = \frac{\Sigma R}{N}$$

$$P_{01} = \frac{676.7}{4}; P_{01} = 169.2$$

3. Weighted Aggregative Method:

In this method, different weights are assigned to the items according to their relative importance. Weights used are the quantity weights. Many formulae have been developed to estimate index numbers on the basis of quantity weights.

Some of them are explained below:

(*i*) **Laspeyre's Formula.** In this formula, the quantities of base year are accepted as weights.

$$P_{01} = \frac{\Sigma P_1 q_0}{\Sigma P_0 q_0} \times 100$$

Where P_1 is the price in the current year ; P_0 is the price in the base year ; and q_0 is the quantity in the base year.

(*ii*) **Paasche's Formula.** In this formula, the quantities of the current year are accepted as weights.

$$P_{01} = \frac{\Sigma P_1 q_1}{\Sigma P_0 q_1} \times 100$$

Where q_1 is the quantity in the current year.

(*iii*) **Dorbish and Bowley's Formula.** Dorbish and Bowley's formula for estimating weighted index number is as follows :

$$P_{01} = \frac{\frac{\Sigma P_1 q_0}{\Sigma P_0 q_0} + \frac{\Sigma P_1 q_1}{\Sigma P_0 q_1}}{2} \times 100 \quad \text{or} \quad p_{01} = \frac{L + P}{2}$$

Where L is Laspeyre's index and P is paasche's Index.

(*iv*) **Fisher's Ideal Formula.** In this formula, the geometric mean of two indices (i.e., Laspeyre's Index and paasche's Index) is taken :

$$p_{01} = \sqrt{\frac{\Sigma P_1 q_0}{\Sigma P_0 q_0} \times \frac{\Sigma P_1 q_1}{\Sigma P_0 q_1}} \times 100 \quad \text{or} \quad P_{01} = \sqrt{L \times P} \times 100$$

where L is Lespeyre's Index and P is paasche's Index.

Example

Comm-odity	Base Year		Current Year		P_0q_0	P_1q_0	P_0q_1	P_1q_1
	P_0	q_0	P_1	q_1				
A	10	5	20	2	50	100	20	40
B	15	4	25	8	60	100	120	200
C	40	2	60	6	80	120	240	360
D	25	3	40	4	75	120	100	160
Total					265 ΣP_0q_0	440 ΣP_1q_0	480 ΣP_0q_1	760 ΣP_1q_1

(*i*) Laspeyre's Formula :

$$p_{01} = \frac{\Sigma P_1 q_0}{\Sigma P_0 q_0} \times 100$$

$$p_{01} = \frac{440}{265} \times 100 = 166.04$$

(*ii*) Paasche' Formula :

$$p_{01} = \frac{\Sigma P_1 q_1}{\Sigma P_0 q_1} \times 100$$

$$p_{01} = \frac{700}{480} \times 100 = 158.3$$

(*iii*) Dorbish and Bowley's Formula :

$$p_{01} = \frac{\frac{\Sigma P_1 q_0}{\Sigma P_0 q_0} + \frac{\Sigma P_1 q_1}{\Sigma P_0 q_1}}{2} \times 100 = 162.2$$

$$p_{01} = \frac{\frac{440}{265} + \frac{760}{480}}{2} \times 100 = 162$$

(*iv*) Fisher's Ideal Formula :

$$p_{01} = \sqrt{\frac{\Sigma P_1 q_0}{\Sigma P_0 q_0} \times \frac{\Sigma P_1 q_1}{\Sigma P_0 q_1}} \times 100$$

$$p_{01} = \sqrt{\frac{440}{265} \times \frac{760}{480}} \times 100 = 162.1$$

4. Weighted Average of Relatives Method:

In this method also different weights are used for the items according to their relative importance.

The price index number is found out with the help of the following formula:

$$P_{01} = \frac{\Sigma RW}{\Sigma W}$$

where ΣW stands for the sum of weights of different commodities :
and ΣR stands for the sum of price relatives.

Commodity	Weights W	Base Prices Year P_0	Current Year Prices P_1	Price Relatives $R = \frac{P_1}{P_0} \times 100$	RW
A	5	10	20	20/10 × 100 = 200.0	1000.0
B	4	15	25	25/15 × 100 = 166.7	666.8
C	2	40	60	60/40 ×100 = 150.0	300.0
D	3	25	40	40/25 × 100 = 160.0	480.0
Total	ΣW=14				ΣRW = 2446.8

$$\text{Index Number } (P_{01}) = \frac{\Sigma RW}{\Sigma W}$$

$$p_{01} = \frac{2446.8}{14} = 174.8$$

IV. Types of Index Numbers:

Index numbers are of different types.

Important types of index numbers are discussed below:

1. Wholesale Price Index Numbers:

Wholesale price index numbers are constructed on the basis of the wholesale prices of certain important commodities. The commodities included in preparing these index numbers are mainly raw-materials and semi-finished goods. Only the most important and most price-sensitive and semi- finished goods which are bought and sold in the wholesale market are selected and weights are assigned in accordance with their relative importance.

The wholesale price index numbers are generally used to measure changes in the value of money. The main problem with these index numbers is that they include only the wholesale prices of raw materials and semi-finished goods and do not take into consideration the retail prices of goods and services generally consumed by the common man. Hence, the wholesale price index numbers do not reflect true and accurate changes in the value of money.

2. Retail Price Index Numbers:

These index numbers are prepared to measure the changes.in the value of money on the basis of the retail prices of final consumption goods. The main difficulty with this index number is that the retail price for the same goods and for continuous periods is not available. The retail prices represent larger and more frequent fluctuations as compared to the wholesale prices.

3. Cost-of-Living Index Numbers:

These index numbers are constructed with reference to the important goods and services which are consumed by common people. Since the number of these goods and services is very large, only representative items which form the consumption pattern of the people are included. These index numbers are used to measure changes in the cost of living of the general public.

4. Working Class Cost-of-Living Index Numbers:

The working class cost-of-living index numbers aim at measuring changes in the cost of living of workers. These index numbers are consumed on the basis of only those goods and services which are generally consumed by the working class. The prices of these goods and index numbers are of great importance to the workers because their wages are adjusted according to these indices.

5. Wage Index Numbers:

The purpose of these index numbers is to measure time to time changes in money wages. These index numbers, when compared with the working class cost-of-living index numbers, provide information regarding the changes in the real wages of the workers.

6. Industrial Index Numbers:

Industrial index numbers are constructed with an objective of measuring changes in the industrial production. The production data of various industries are included in preparing these index numbers.

V. Importance of Index Numbers:

Index numbers are used to measure all types of quantitative changes in different fields.

Various advantages of index numbers are given below:

1. General Importance:

In general, index numbers are very useful in a number of ways:

(a) They measure changes in one variable or in a group of variables.

(b) They are useful in making comparisons with respect to different places or different periods of time,

(c) They are helpful in simplifying the complex facts.

(d) They are helpful in forecasting about the future,

(e) They are very useful in academic as well as practical research.

2. Useful in All Fields:

Index numbers are useful in almost all the fields. They are specially important in economic field.

Some of the specific uses of index numbers in the economic field are:

(a) They are useful in analysing markets for specific commodities.

(b) In the share market, the index numbers can provide data about the trends in the share prices,

(c) With the help of index numbers, the Railways can get information about the changes in goods traffic.

(d) The bankers can get information about the changes in deposits by means of index numbers