

CONTEMPORARY METHODS FOR TEACHING CLASSICAL UZBEK VOCAL REPERTOIRE

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Abstract: The preservation and transmission of Classical Uzbek vocal repertoire, a cornerstone of Central Asian intangible cultural heritage centered on the Shashmaqom and regional maqom traditions, face significant pedagogical challenges in modern higher education. The historical master-apprentice system, while profound, often struggles to meet the standardized, curriculum-driven, and time-bound constraints of university music departments. This article examines the development and application of contemporary teaching methodologies designed to bridge this gap. It argues for a synthesized pedagogical model that integrates essential elements of traditional oral transmission with structured, analytical, and technology-enhanced approaches. Drawing upon ethnomusicological theory and practice-based research, the article analyzes specific techniques for teaching microtonal intonation, complex rhythmic cycles, ornamentation (naqshlar), and the profound poetic-melodic connection. Furthermore, it explores the role of digital archives, acoustic analysis software, and comparative listening in supplementing direct oral transmission. The article concludes that such a multifaceted approach not only ensures more effective skill acquisition and theoretical understanding for students but also fosters a deeper, more resilient engagement with the spiritual and aesthetic dimensions of Classical Uzbek vocal art, thereby securing its vitality for future generations.

Keywords: Uzbek Maqom pedagogy, vocal technique transmission, classical music curriculum, oral tradition innovation, cross-cultural music education, intangible cultural heritage teaching

Introduction

Classical Uzbek vocal music, epitomized by the monumental Shashmaqom (Six Maqoms) and other regional maqom cycles, represents one of the world's most sophisticated and refined art music traditions. Its intricate melodic modes (maqom), intricate rhythmic patterns, profound poetic texts drawn from classical Persian and Chaghatay poetry, and its deep spiritual and philosophical connotations demand a high level of artistic and intellectual commitment from the performer. For centuries, its transmission was governed by the ustoz-shogird (master-student) tradition, an immersive, holistic, and highly personalized process of oral-aural learning within a communal context. This method prioritized deep listening, meticulous imitation, and the gradual, often non-verbal, internalization of style, technique, and even ethical conduct.

The integration of this tradition into the formal structure of university education in Uzbekistan and elsewhere presents a fundamental pedagogical dilemma. Academic institutions operate on semester schedules, standardized curricula, graded assessments, and group instruction - parameters seemingly at odds with the fluid, lifelong, and individualistic nature of the traditional model. This disconnect risks a superficial transmission where technical elements are learned but the essence (ruh) of the tradition may be diluted. Consequently, there is an urgent need to develop and systematize contemporary teaching methods that are respectful of the tradition's integrity

while being effective within an academic framework. This article investigates these emergent methodologies. Its primary objective is to articulate a coherent pedagogical synthesis for the university-level instruction of Classical Uzbek vocal repertoire. It posits that a deliberate fusion of traditional practice with modern pedagogical tools and theoretical analysis can create a robust and sustainable model for advanced musical education in this field.

Methods

The findings and proposals presented in this article are derived from a multi-faceted research approach combining qualitative ethnomusicological methodology with practice-based pedagogical inquiry. Primary research involved extended fieldwork spanning several years, including participatory observation in masterclasses at the State Conservatory of Uzbekistan and the National Institute of Maqom Art in Tashkent. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with twenty prominent ustoz teachers (aged 55-85) and thirty university students (aged 18-30) to document traditional pedagogical philosophies and contemporary learning challenges.

A core component of the methodology was the author's own applied pedagogical practice. Over five academic years, a series of experimental teaching modules were designed and implemented within vocal departments, focusing on specific challenges such as parda (microtonal interval) accuracy and usul (rhythmic cycle) competency. These modules incorporated various tools: high-quality audio recordings from archival and contemporary sources, visual aids representing melodic contours and rhythmic structures, and software like Sonic Visualiser for spectral analysis of pitch. Comparative listening sessions utilizing recordings of different historical performers (e.g., Yunus Rajabi, Turgun Alimatov, Munojat Yulchieva) were integrated to demonstrate stylistic variation.

Student progress was assessed not only through performance examinations but also through reflective journals and analytical assignments where students described their learning process and analyzed recordings. This mixed-methods approach allowed for the evaluation of both technical proficiency and conceptual understanding, providing a comprehensive view of the efficacy of the synthesized teaching strategies.

Results

The application of synthesized teaching methods yielded significant results across several key areas of the Classical vocal curriculum. First, in the domain of pitch and mode (maqom), the abstract concept of pardalar - the specific, often microtonal, degrees within a maqom - proved challenging to teach through imitation alone in a classroom setting. The supplemental use of spectrogram analysis provided a visual reinforcement of the target intervals. While not advocating for equal-tempered quantification, this tool helped students calibrate their hearing and vocal production. For instance, analyzing the nuanced difference between the Uzzal mode's nim bémol (slightly flattened) second degree and a standard minor second became an objective exercise, deepening their aural perception. This technological aid, when used as a reference point alongside the teacher's live demonstration, accelerated the students' acquisition of precise intonation.

Second, the teaching of complex rhythmic cycles (usullar) such as Chorgoh (14/8), Beshiru (9/8), or Sakil (6/8) benefited immensely from a multi-sensory approach. Beyond vocalizing the dombir or chang pattern ("tom-taka-taka"), students were engaged in rhythmic corporeality. They were taught to embody the cycle through structured hand-clapping (dast), foot-tapping, and conducted patterns that subdivided the beat. This kinetic internalization, moving beyond rote

memorization of the mnemonic, led to a more secure and musically intelligent execution. Students could then focus on the poetic-melodic line while their embodied sense maintained the rhythmic architecture, a crucial skill for performing the through-composed sarakhbor and talqin sections of a maqom.

Third, the transmission of ornamentation (naqshlar) and vocal timbre (ovoz sifati) - elements most vulnerable to loss - was enhanced through a structured comparative method. Students were tasked with analyzing multiple performances of the same ghazal within a maqom, such as "Nasrulloi" in Bayot. They identified, notated graphically, and attempted to reproduce specific ornamental figures from different masters, discussing how Munojat Yulchieva's delicate kampira (grace note) differs in affect from a more declarative approach. This analytical listening fostered a critical understanding of ornamentation as expressive rhetoric rather than mere decoration. It empowered students to make informed artistic choices within the stylistic boundaries of the tradition.

Finally, the integration of literary analysis (matnshunoslik) into vocal lessons proved transformative. Joint sessions with literature specialists unpacked the mystical metaphors of Navoi or Bedil poetry line by line. Students explored how the musical setting, through its melodic contour, phrasing, and emphasis, illuminated the poetic text's meaning (mazmun). Understanding that a melisma on the word "dil" (heart) or a sustained note on "jon" (soul) was a deliberate aesthetic intensification moved their performance from correct rendition to interpretative communication. This interdisciplinary dialogue between music and poetry pedagogy ensured the tradition's intellectual depth was preserved alongside its sonic form.

Discussion

The results demonstrate that a consciously hybrid pedagogical model can effectively address the inherent tensions between traditional oral transmission and contemporary institutional education. The successful integration of technological tools like acoustic software does not represent a capitulation to Western analytical paradigms, but rather a pragmatic adoption of available resources to sharpen the primary tool: the cultivated ear. The visual representation of sound can serve as a valuable feedback mechanism, reducing the frustration students often feel when struggling to replicate subtle pitch variations solely by ear in a limited time frame. It is a bridge to greater aural acuity, not a replacement for it.

Similarly, the systematization of rhythmic training through corporeal techniques and the comparative analysis of ornamentation style formalizes aspects of knowledge that were traditionally absorbed osmotically over many years. In the compressed timeframe of a university degree, such systematization is not only beneficial but necessary to ensure a foundational competency. Crucially, this structured approach must always be anchored by the living presence of the ustoz. The teacher's demonstration, their nuanced phrasing, their timbral quality, and their explanation of the music's spiritual and emotional context (holat) remain irreplaceable. The contemporary methods discussed here are best understood as a scaffold that supports and accelerates the core master-student relationship, not a substitute for it.

A significant finding is the transformative impact of integrating poetic analysis. This aligns the pedagogical model more closely with the tradition's own holistic worldview, where sound, word, and meaning are inseparable. It counters a potential reduction of maqom to a purely melodic or technical exercise. By making the semantic and symbolic content of the lyrics a central

pillar of study, the teaching process actively cultivates the intellectual and spiritual maturity required of a true haqfq (singer).

Challenges remain. Curriculum development must be sensitive to avoid an over-standardization that stifles individual artistic development. Assessment criteria must balance technical accuracy with the recognition of emerging personal style and deep expressiveness. Furthermore, the teacher training itself is critical; the new generation of instructors must be fluent in both the tradition's depths and these modern pedagogical strategies.

Conclusion

The teaching of Classical Uzbek vocal repertoire in the twenty-first-century university demands both fidelity and innovation. As this article has argued, a rigid adherence to only traditional methods within an institutional setting risks inefficiency and potential disengagement, while a wholesale adoption of Western conservatory models risks eroding the music's essential character. The path forward lies in a thoughtful, respectful synthesis.

Contemporary effective methods involve supplementing the irreplaceable oral-aural core of the ustoz-shogird model with targeted analytical and technological tools. These include acoustic analysis for pitch refinement, kinetic exercises for rhythm internalization, comparative listening for stylistic understanding, and interdisciplinary collaboration for poetic interpretation. This multifaceted approach addresses the practical constraints of academic schedules while deepening, rather than diluting, the student's engagement. It aims to produce musicians who are not merely technicians of the maqom, but culturally knowledgeable, intellectually engaged, and artistically sensitive bearers of the tradition. By constructing such a robust pedagogical bridge, the profound art of Classical Uzbek vocal music can resonate with vitality and meaning for generations of university students to come, ensuring its enduring place in the global tapestry of human artistic achievement.

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