

FROM TECHNIQUE TO TRADITION TEACHING THE UZBEK DUTAR IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract: The integration of the Uzbek dutar, a pillar of Central Asian musical heritage, into formal higher education curricula represents a critical site of cultural negotiation. This article examines the pedagogical journey required to move students from the acquisition of instrumental technique to a profound, internalized understanding of the musical tradition it embodies. It argues that a dutar program within a university or conservatory setting must consciously bridge the methodological gap between standardized, technical instruction and the holistic, mentorship-based transmission of the *ustoz-shogird* model. The analysis identifies a persistent risk: producing technically proficient players who lack the deeper cultural, aesthetic, and improvisational competencies that define authentic artistry within the *maqom* tradition. To address this, the article proposes a tripartite pedagogical framework. First, it advocates for a technique curriculum derived directly from the demands of the repertoire, ensuring that skills are never abstract. Second, it emphasizes the essential integration of theoretical knowledge - specifically *maqomshunoslik* and *usul* - with performance practice from the earliest stages. Finally, and most critically, it explores methods for cultivating traditional artistic decision-making, guiding students from the accurate reproduction of notated music toward the development of their own informed voice within the strict parameters of the tradition. The study concludes that success in higher education hinges on creating a simulated *ustoz-shogird* ecosystem within the institution, one that values cultural immersion, aural learning, and artistic mentorship alongside formal assessment, thereby ensuring the graduation of true cultural bearers rather than merely skilled instrumentalists.

Keywords: Uzbek dutar pedagogy, higher music education, *maqomshunoslik* integration, technical tradition, artistic improvisation, cultural transmission

Introduction

The dutar, with its long neck, two strings, and evocative timbre, is more than Uzbekistan's national instrument; it is a sonic vessel of history, poetry, and spiritual philosophy. Its traditional pedagogy, perfected over centuries, was an immersive, lifelong process within the intimate *ustoz-shogird* relationship. This model transmitted not only fingering and repertoire but an entire worldview - a sense of melodic responsibility, the emotional weight of modes, and the etiquette of performance. The 20th-century establishment of state conservatories and university music departments across Central Asia, however, initiated a profound shift. The dutar entered the classroom, encountering syllabi, standardized examinations, Western notation, and the compartmentalization of knowledge into distinct subjects like "special instrument," "music theory," and "ethnomusicology."

This institutionalization, while granting the tradition academic legitimacy and structured pathways for students, has engendered a persistent pedagogical challenge. There is a discernible rift between teaching the dutar as an instrument and teaching the cultural tradition of which it is

an inseparable part. A student can learn to play the notes of a Chorgoh terma with clarity and speed, yet remain disconnected from the maqom's poetic essence, its appropriate rhythmic feel, or the principles governing its ornamentation and improvisation. The result can be a performance that is technically correct but culturally and aesthetically shallow - a phenomenon sometimes critically referred to as *mexanik ijro* (mechanical performance).

This article investigates the necessary pedagogical strategies to overcome this rift within the context of higher education. Its central thesis is that effective *dutar* pedagogy must be conceived as a deliberate journey "from technique to tradition." It must design a curriculum where technical mastery is not an end in itself, but the foundational language for accessing a deeper cultural discourse. The study employs a qualitative methodology, drawing on ethnomusicological pedagogy theory, analysis of current curricula at institutions like the State Conservatory of Uzbekistan, and the author's extensive experience as both a performer and educator. The discussion is structured to first address the need for a culturally-grounded technique, then to argue for the inseparable integration of theory and performance, and finally to explore the pinnacle of pedagogy: fostering traditional artistry and informed improvisation within the academic framework.

Cultivating Culturally-Grounded Technique

The first and most fundamental task in reorienting *dutar* pedagogy is to re-conceive the very teaching of technique. In a Western classical model, technique is often systematized into scales, etudes, and exercises designed to build abstract physical prowess - speed, independence, strength - which is then applied to repertoire. For the *dutar*, this approach can be alienating. Traditional technique is inherently organic and repertoire-specific; it emerged from the demands of the music itself.

Therefore, a pedagogical model rooted in tradition must derive its technical curriculum directly from the core repertoire. The foundational right-hand stroke, the *zarb*, is not taught in isolation. It is first introduced through the simple, open-string rhythms of a basic folk *naqsh* or *terma*. The student learns the weight and angle of the strike not to achieve a generic "good tone," but to produce the specific resonant, percussive sound required for that piece. Similarly, left-hand technique begins not with chromatic scales, but with the fundamental finger patterns of the most common tetrachords in *Segoh* or *Chorgoh* modes. The subtle slides (*surish*), hammer-ons (*chapak*), and pull-offs are introduced as essential ornaments to specific melodic turns within a well-known folk song. This approach ensures that from the very first lesson, technique is semantically charged; it carries musical meaning and cultural style.

A critical component of this grounded technique is the cultivation of microtonal sensitivity. The *dutar*'s fretless neck is not a liability to be managed, but the instrument's soul, allowing for the precise *tartib* (intonation) of each *maqom*. Students must develop an ear capable of distinguishing the slightly lowered third degree in *Segoh* from the neutral third in *Navo*. Pedagogy here relies heavily on aural imitation. The teacher plays a short phrase; the student attempts to match not just the notes, but the exact pitch contour. This is reinforced by constant drone practice, where the open string acts as a reference point, and by singing phrases before playing them, internalizing the pitch through the voice. The use of fixed-pitch instruments like the piano as a primary reference must be carefully moderated, as it can inadvertently "flatten" the student's

intuitive grasp of flexible intonation. Technique, in this framework, encompasses the ear as much as the hand.

Integrating Maqomshunoslik and Usul into Performance Practice

In traditional learning, theory was never a separate subject; it was the logic explained through performance. In higher education, the compartmentalization of “Special Instrument” and “Theory of Maqom” classes can create a dangerous disconnect. A student may analyze the scale structure of Buzruk in a theory class but never experience its profound, dignified emotional weight in the practice room. Effective pedagogy must forcibly integrate these domains.

The study of maqomshunoslik must be applied and immediate. When students learn about the maye (tonic) and shahid (dominant) in a theoretical module, their instrumental teacher must concurrently assign repertoire that starkly illustrates these functions. Exercises should involve improvising simple melodic resolutions to these poles, feeling their gravitational pull. The concept of shu’be (branches) should be taught not as a taxonomic list, but as a living palette of melodic motifs that students learn to recognize, sing, and transpose on their instrument. The teacher’s role is to constantly act as a translator, pointing to the theoretical concept manifest in the phrase the student just played: “That flourish you used? That is a characteristic girish (entry) for the Ushshoq branch.”

Similarly, the internalization of usul (rhythmic cycles) must move beyond clapping tests in a theory exam. Rhythmic competence is the bedrock of groove and feel. Students must learn each major usul (e.g., Sakil, Mokhammas, Hazaj) by first vocalizing its pattern (dom and tak), then by playing its characteristic naqsh (ostinato) on the open strings of the dutar, and finally by applying that naqsh underneath simple melodic fragments. Advanced integration involves “usul modulation” exercises, where a fixed melodic line is adapted to fit different rhythmic cycles, teaching the student the flexible relationship between melody and meter. Ensemble work with a doyra (frame drum) player is non-negotiable here, as it forces the dutarist to lock into an external rhythmic grid, developing a collective sense of time that is central to traditional performance practice. This integration ensures that theoretical knowledge becomes a practical toolkit for navigation, not just an academic requirement.

Fostering Traditional Artistry and Informed Improvisation

The ultimate marker of a musician’s transition from technician to tradition-bearer is their capacity for ijro ixtiro - creative, informed performance. This is the most significant challenge for institutional pedagogy, as it requires nurturing intuition, taste, and personal voice within a highly structured system. The goal is to graduate students who can not only play a maqom suite but narrate it, making thoughtful artistic decisions in real time.

This process begins with what can be termed “controlled variation.” After a student has perfectly memorized a terma or a shu’be, the teacher instructs them to play it again, this time altering one element: the ornamentation on a cadence, the rhythm of a particular motif, or the density of the tremolo. This teaches that the musical text is not inviolable but a flexible model. The next step involves structural improvisation within defined parameters. For example, in studying the Sarakhbor (improvisatory introduction) of a maqom, students are given a limited set of permissible melodic motifs, a defined modal range, and a clear endpoint. Their task is to assemble these components into a coherent, personal statement that adheres to the architectural and emotional conventions of the form.

Pedagogy at this level becomes heavily reliant on the analysis of canonical recordings. Students listen to multiple interpretations of the same Tanovar section by different masters (e.g., Turgun Alimatov, Ozodbek Nazarbekov). They are tasked not with choosing a “best” version, but with analyzing the choices each master made: where did one add an extra repetition? Where did another use an unusually sparse texture? This cultivates critical listening and an understanding of the spectrum of acceptable artistry. Furthermore, the creation of a majlis-style workshop environment within the university is essential. In these informal gatherings, students perform for each other and a master teacher, receiving feedback framed as dialogue: “Why did you move to the upper register at that moment?” or “How might you have heightened the tension before the resolution?” This shifts the student’s mindset from executing a fixed plan to actively shaping a musical narrative with intention and awareness of the tradition’s aesthetic values.

Conclusion

Teaching the Uzbek dutar in higher education is a complex act of cultural translation. It requires building a bridge between the systematized, explicit knowledge structure of the academy and the implicit, holistic knowledge system of the traditional ustoz-shogird lineage. This article has argued that this bridge can be constructed through a pedagogy consciously designed to move students “from technique to tradition.”

This journey necessitates a foundational technique curriculum born from the repertoire itself, ensuring physical skills are imbued with cultural meaning from the outset. It demands the dissolution of barriers between performance and theory, weaving the study of maqomshunoslik and usul directly into the fabric of instrumental practice, so that theoretical concepts become felt, sonic realities. Finally, and most ambitiously, it requires creating pedagogical spaces - both in curriculum and in culture - that nurture traditional artistry. This involves guiding students through graduated stages of creative engagement, from controlled variation to informed structural improvisation, all while grounding their choices in the deep analysis of the tradition’s masterworks.

The success of this endeavor hinges on the educator embodying a dual role: that of the university professor who structures and assesses, and that of the ustoz who mentors and inspires. It also requires institutional flexibility to value aural-oral learning, communal music-making, and the slow development of artistic sensibility alongside more easily quantifiable skills. By embracing this integrative model, higher education can fulfill its potential not as a museum that preserves the dutar in notation, but as a dynamic ecosystem that cultivates a new generation of san’atkors. These graduates will be distinguished not merely by their technical facility, but by their ability to think, feel, and create within the profound and resonant universe of Uzbek musical tradition, ensuring its vibrant continuity in an ever-changing world.

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