METHODS IN DUTAR EDUCATION: TRADITIONAL APPROACHES AND CONTEMPORARY PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES

Abdurashidova Dilrabo
Teacher, Department of “Maqom Instrumental Performance”, Institute of Uzbek National Musical Art named after Yunus Rajabi, Tashkent, Republic of Uzbekistan
E-mail: abdurashidova.dilrabo@gmail.com
https://orcid.org/0009-0005-7917-1308
DOI: 10.67620/artdsgn.690003

Abstract. *The article looks at how the Uzbek dutar is taught today and what methodological principles stand behind that teaching, both in the older oral tradition and in the conservatoire-type system. Our main concern is the meeting point between the ustoz-shogird (master–apprentice) way of learning and the academic lesson with its curricula and examinations. We discuss sound production, fingering, rhythmic coordination of the hands, musical memory, stylistic interpretation and the learning of traditional repertoire, and we ask how regional performance schools shape a young player's artistic identity. On this basis a teaching model is suggested. It rests on demonstration and imitation, analytical listening, a planned sequence of technical exercises, work on repertoire and, at later stages, the student's own creative tasks. Our position is that a dutar teacher cannot choose between tradition and modern method; the two have to be held together. Where this is done, students tend to gain not only in technique but also in artistic independence, in their sense of the culture behind the music, and in readiness for the concert stage.*

Keywords: *dutar, music education, instrumental pedagogy, ustoz-shogird tradition, performance technique, Uzbek traditional music, musical interpretation.*

Introduction

For centuries the dutar has accompanied musical life in Uzbekistan. At first sight it looks like a modest instrument: a long neck, two strings, a small pear-shaped body. Anyone who has tried to play it seriously, though, soon discovers how much technical and expressive variety lies behind that simple shape. Each region has worked out its own manner of striking the strings, shaping a melody, handling rhythm and adding ornaments. For this reason we do not regard the dutar merely as an accompanying instrument or a vehicle for folk tunes. It is one of the carriers of the nation's musical memory.

Teaching the dutar is therefore much more than showing a student how to hold the instrument and read notes from a page. The learner has to grow into the musical language that belongs to it: how a melody is built and where it is heading, how rhythmic figures are grouped, how one note passes into the next, and what gives a particular piece its character. These things cannot really be taught one by one. A technically correct performance without a sense of style usually sounds clean but empty; on the other hand, a player who relies on intuition alone soon reaches the limits of what poor technique allows.

For many generations this knowledge travelled from one musician to another within the

ustoz-shogird tradition. A pupil sat next to the master, watched, listened, repeated phrases and gradually began to take part in real performance. A great deal of what was passed on in this way was never written down at all: a characteristic articulation, a slight stretching or tightening of the rhythm, a teacher's personal way of reading a piece.

John Baily's work on learning to perform offers a helpful point of comparison here. He shows that practical participation can open up aspects of a tradition that remain hidden when one relies only on theoretical description (Baily, 2001). His material is Afghan, not Uzbek, yet his methodological conclusions apply quite well to instrumental teaching across Central Asia.

The situation of a teacher in a modern music school or institute is more complicated. Students must read notation, understand form, acquire dependable technique and learn to work without constant supervision. The difficulty is to meet these academic demands without losing the practical knowledge and stylistic feeling that the older way of learning provided. In this article we therefore ask how the principles of *ustoz-shogird* education might be combined with structured technical work, listening tasks and teaching through repertoire.

Research Methodology

Several methods were used, each covering a different side of the problem:

- Historical analysis, to trace how dutar performance and its teaching traditions developed.
- Comparative analysis of master–apprentice learning and institutional music education.
- Pedagogical analysis, aimed at identifying which teaching methods work at which stage of a player's development.
- Performance analysis of the technical and artistic features of dutar playing.
- A systemic approach, used to arrange technical, theoretical and artistic competencies into one connected teaching model.

We also rely on studies that deal with the links between musical practice, cultural transmission and instrumental learning (Baily & Doubleday, 1988; Baily, 2001). It should be said plainly that the article does not report a controlled experiment. What it offers is a pedagogical model, drawn largely from teaching practice, which still needs to be tested empirically in specialized music schools and in higher education.

The Ustoz-Shogird Tradition in Dutar Education

The *ustoz-shogird* system depends on the teacher being closely involved in every step of the student's growth. What sets it apart is that knowledge is passed on directly, through doing. The master does not simply describe how a passage should go. He or she plays it, shows the movements, points to expressive details and lets the student see, and hear, how a technical decision changes the sound.

Usually the work begins with short melodic fragments. The student listens to the teacher and tries to reproduce what was heard, first slowly, then more continuously. Repetition matters a great deal, but it easily turns mechanical. The teacher has to tell the student what to listen for: is every note clear, are the sounds connected, where do the accents fall, where is the melody going.

In our experience the main strength of this way of teaching is that it does not separate technique from musical understanding. Watching the teacher, the student notices more than the order of the notes. He or she picks up the manner of playing itself, including articulation, ornaments, rhythmic freedom and the way one phrase answers another.

Much of this is missing from a written score. Notation fixes pitch and duration, but the character of a traditional performance often rests on conventions that are learned only by listening and playing. Discussing musical learning in Afghanistan, Baily and Doubleday (1988) stress how

important it is to be immersed in a musical environment and to absorb performance knowledge gradually, by taking part. The same holds for the dutar class: students gain a lot from hearing experienced players, playing alongside their teacher and joining ensembles.

Still, it would be wrong to reduce the traditional system to copying. As the student matures, he or she must begin to understand why a master plays a passage in a certain way and to make informed interpretive choices. The teacher's role shifts accordingly, from demonstrating every detail to guiding the student's own musical judgement.

Development of Instrumental Technique

No one would deny that technical preparation is essential, but it pays off best when the exercises are tied to what actual pieces demand. The goal is not faster fingers for their own sake, nor an endless list of exercises. Technical work should respond to the concrete problems that arise in the repertoire the student is learning.

In the first lessons the student needs to find a comfortable relationship with the instrument. When the dutar is held correctly, both hands move freely and unnecessary tension disappears. The teacher watches the shoulders, arms, wrists and fingers and corrects them where needed. Since students differ physically, we see little sense in imposing one rigid position on everyone without regard for individual comfort and the technical task in hand.

Sound and rhythm come above all from the right hand. At the start the student should learn to draw a clear, even tone from each string. Then come alternating strokes, combinations of strings and simple rhythmic figures. The quality of the sound deserves constant attention: a passage played fast but with uneven articulation cannot be counted as technical progress.

Tempo, then, should be raised step by step. Accuracy and control come first, at a speed the student can manage. Only once the movement is stable is it time to play faster. This protects the student from habits that would later get in the way of more difficult music.

The left hand needs an equally careful approach. The first exercises train accurate finger placement, smooth shifts between positions and independence of the fingers. Short melodic figures are especially useful, because the student immediately hears the musical result of a physical movement. As control improves, the work can move on to scales, intervals, repeated notes and passages with ornaments.

In practice the following order of technical work has proved useful:

- exercises for single fingers and for their coordination;
- moving between neighbouring positions;
- short melodic figures in different registers;
- scales and intervals;
- repeated notes and rhythmic combinations;
- ornamented passages taken from traditional repertoire.

Coordinating the two hands is a separate problem. Students often struggle when the right hand has to keep a rhythmic pattern going while the left hand moves through a more complicated melodic line. Here it helps to break the passage into parts. The left-hand movement is practised slowly on its own, then the right-hand pattern, and only after that are the two put together. Working this way, it becomes much easier to see where the difficulty actually lies and to correct it.

In the end, technical exercises exist to serve performance. Their worth shows when the student can use a movement accurately inside a piece, keep the sound quality and play the passage without strain.

Development of Musical Hearing and Theoretical Understanding

A student can learn to play a melody correctly and still not understand how it is built. Dutar lessons should therefore include work that trains the ear and the ability to hear melodic relationships.

Traditional dutar music asks the player to feel where a melody is moving, how its phrases are organized, how rhythmic patterns repeat and how expression varies. Students should learn to notice not only separate notes but also how a musical idea returns, grows or is contrasted with another. With this kind of awareness, memorizing a piece becomes meaningful rather than mechanical, and the interpretation becomes more convincing.

For this reason we treat listening as a regular part of the instrumental lesson, not as something that belongs only to theory classes. The teacher may play a professional recording and ask the students to find its main melodic idea. They might then sing it, point out repeated phrases and try to pick out a few passages by ear. Setting two interpretations of the same piece side by side tells them still more about differences in tempo, articulation, ornamentation and phrasing.

Activities of the following kind fit easily into a lesson:

1. listening to a professional performance and naming its main melodic features;
2. singing a short passage before playing it;
3. recognizing repeated, contrasting and developing phrases;
4. playing a simple melody by ear;
5. comparing several interpretations of one composition;
6. talking about how the structure of a piece relates to its expressive character.

Singing before playing is especially valuable for beginners. The student gets to know the shape of the melody before having to think about what the fingers must do. Singing also makes it easier to notice when a phrase falls apart or loses its natural direction.

Campbell (2004) argues that music should be approached through its cultural context, with learners engaging directly with living traditions. This is very relevant to the dutar, since the meaning of a piece is not always clear from its technical structure. Students need to know something about the traditions, the occasions and the performance practices connected with the repertoire they are learning.

Theory should support this practical experience rather than stand apart from it. Some grasp of rhythm, melodic organization, form and the relevant modal features helps students make sense of what they hear and play. The point is to give them the vocabulary and the analytical tools to understand their own music-making.

Repertoire-Based Learning and Artistic Development

What a student plays has a direct effect on how he or she progresses. A piece that is too hard buries its musical character under technical problems. A piece that is too easy no longer gives enough room to grow. The teacher must therefore choose repertoire with both the student's technical level and artistic maturity in mind.

At the elementary stage, short pieces with clear melodic and rhythmic outlines work well. They let the student concentrate on holding the instrument, basic sound production, coordination and the continuity of simple phrases. In the middle years the repertoire can include pieces with harder rhythms, changes of position, ornaments and a wider range of expression. Advanced students should gradually take on large traditional works, concert pieces, ensemble music and arrangements. At this level a technically accurate performance is no longer enough. The student must understand the form of a piece, make sound interpretive decisions and show a personal approach that still respects the style.

Repertoire should also reflect the regional variety of dutar playing. It is a pity when a student spends years on a narrow group of pieces and never meets other interpretations or schools. Gaybullaeva's (2023) study of Uzbek and Karakalpak dutars gives a good basis for discussing how these instruments developed and what distinguishes them. Comparative material of this kind helps students see the diversity of regional traditions and why cultural context matters when approaching a piece.

It is also worth asking students to compare recordings of one and the same piece. Differences in tempo, articulation, ornamentation and the building of phrases give plenty to talk about. The question should not stop at which version they like better; students should also say what musical features make each performance distinct. In this way listening skills grow, and with them the ability to judge for oneself. Individual lessons need to be complemented by public performance and ensemble playing. Playing with others teaches a student to keep the rhythm steady, to listen to partners and to adjust an interpretation to a shared musical context. It also gives a first taste of the practical responsibilities of a working musician.

Assessment, in our view, should cover several sides of musical development (see the table below).

Assessment criterion	**Main indicators**
Technical proficiency	Fingering, coordination, accuracy
Sound quality	Clarity, balance, control
Rhythmic accuracy	Tempo, pulse, rhythmic stability
Musical interpretation	Phrasing, dynamics, expression
Stylistic understanding	Knowledge of traditional performance
Independence	Preparation and self-correction

A workable system of assessment includes regular individual lessons, practical examinations, ensemble work and public concerts. We also find it helpful when students record themselves and keep track of their own progress.

Conclusion

Teaching the dutar calls for an approach in which traditional performance knowledge and modern educational methods are combined. The *ustoz-shogird* tradition remains the foundation, since it passes on stylistic features, practical know-how and artistic values that notation alone cannot convey.

Institutional education, for its part, demands systematic technical training, theoretical understanding, analytical listening and the ability to learn independently. The approach outlined here brings together demonstration, imitation and repetition with work on repertoire, comparative listening and the student's own creative tasks.

Whether dutar teaching succeeds depends, finally, on how well technical skill, cultural knowledge and artistic expression are made to work together. Teaching of this kind helps to keep the national musical tradition alive and, at the same time, prepares a new generation of performers who are both professionally competent and independent in their artistic thinking.

REFERENCES

1. Абдурашидова, Д. (2025). АРУЗ И МУЗЫКА: КАК РИТМИЧЕСКАЯ СИСТЕМА ДУТАРА ПОМОГАЕТ ОСВОЕНИЮ РИТМИКИ СТИХА. Вестник Санкт-Петербургского университета, 18-28.

2. Abdurashidova, D. (2025). О способах извлечения звуков на дутаре и их обозначении: On the Methods of Sound Production on the Dutor and Their Notation. Journal of national culture (JNC), 1(2), 11-20.
3. Abdurashidova, D. A. (2024). Dutorda ijro qilish texnikalari orqali aruz metroritmik qonunlarini o'rganish haqida.". Musiqa ta'limi va san'atining bugungi globallashuv sharoitda milliy-ijtimoiy ahamiyati: тиатто va уесЫт1ar"(ASR), Tashkent, Uzbekistan. Academic Scientific Research Group.
4. Baily, J. (2001). Learning to perform as a research technique in ethnomusicology. British Journal of Ethnomusicology, 10(2), 85–98. https://doi.org/10.1080/09681220108567321
5. Baily, J., & Doubleday, V. (1988). Modèle d'imprégnation musicale en Afghanistan. Cahiers de musiques traditionnelles, (1), 112–124.
6. Campbell, P. S. (2004). Teaching music globally: Experiencing music, expressing culture. Oxford University Press.
7. Gaybullaeva, X. N. (2023). The development of Uzbek and Karakalpak dutors and their peculiarities. Modern Science and Research, 2(8), 53–57. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8213399
8. Makharov, N. (2025). The Uzbek national school of composition: past and present. Journal of national culture, 1(1), 46-53.
9. Makharov, N. (2025). Новые горизонты в хоровой музыке: интеграция арабской и узбекской музыкальных традиций. Journal of national culture, 1(2), 22-31.
10. Makharov, N., Radjabova, D., Abdurashidova, D., & Khandamyan, V. S. (2025). Кросс-культурная синергия в музыке: Пути сотрудничества между узбекскими и кувейтскими композиторами. Вестник Санкт-Петербургского университета, 38–45.
11. Nettl, B. (2015). The study of ethnomusicology: Thirty-three discussions (3rd ed.). University of Illinois Press.
12. Turatova, D. (2025). Developing creative competencies through folk instrument performance (using the traditional dutar as an example). Acta NUUz, 1(1.12.1), 155–158. https://doi.org/10.69617/nuuz.v1i1.12.1.10523
13. Zufarov, A. (2023). Maqomlar asosida bastalangan asarlar: Saidjon Kalonovning “Topmadim” asari misolida. *Oriental Art and Culture, 4(5)*, 331–339.