METHODS IN RUBAB EDUCATION: THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND PRACTICAL APPROACHES

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Abstract. *The article deals with the theoretical and practical grounds of teaching the Uzbek rubab in specialized music schools and in higher music education, where the aim is to form professional instrumental competence. We consider how traditional performance practice relates to present-day teaching, and look closely at the position of the instrument, plectrum technique, fingering, rhythmic coordination, sound production and musical interpretation. Particular weight is given to a gradual build-up of technique, to the choice of repertoire, to analytical listening and to work with each student individually. We also discuss the difference between knowledge that lives in traditional performance and the standardized methods of academic teaching. The methodological framework suggested here combines demonstration and imitation, technical exercises, analysis of repertoire, ensemble playing and the student's own practice. In our view, rubab teaching is effective only when technical accuracy goes together with a feeling for style and an awareness of the culture the music comes from. Bringing these elements together strengthens students as performers and helps to preserve and develop Uzbek instrumental traditions.*

Keywords: *rubab, Qashqar rubab, instrumental pedagogy, plectrum technique, music education, performance methodology, Uzbek traditional music.*

Introduction

Among the plucked string instruments of Central Asia, the rubab holds a special place. In Uzbekistan it is above all the Qashqar rubab that one hears in traditional instrumental music, in folk ensembles, in orchestras of national instruments and in the classrooms of music schools and institutes.

Its timbre and its technical possibilities are quite particular, and they shape the way the instrument has to be taught. The rubab can carry a singing melodic line, but it is equally suited to sharp rhythmic figures, ornaments and fast virtuoso writing.

The place of the rubab in education cannot be separated from the wider history of national instrumental performance. A student who takes up the instrument has to master not just a set of physical and technical skills but also the musical traditions out of which the rubab grew.

In 2024 the art of crafting and playing the rubab was inscribed by UNESCO as intangible cultural heritage shared by several countries of Central and South Asia (UNESCO, 2024). The inscription is a reminder that this knowledge survives mainly through practical transmission, from player to player and from teacher to student.

Today rubab teaching in educational institutions is increasingly framed by curricula, individual lessons, examinations, ensemble classes and concerts. This raises an obvious practical question: how can the experience of traditional performers be joined with the principles of modern education?

Research Methodology

Four kinds of analysis were used: historical, comparative, pedagogical and performance analysis.

The historical part follows the cultural development of rubab playing. The comparative part looks at how traditional and academic instrumental instruction differ. Pedagogical analysis helps to pick out the key stages of technical development, while performance analysis concerns the link between technique and artistic interpretation.

We also draw on John Baily's ethnomusicological work on the Afghan rubab. His studies say a good deal about how instrumental knowledge is passed on, how rhythmic improvisation is organized and how the movements of the body are bound up with the music itself (Baily, 1988; Baily 1989).

One caution is needed here. The Afghan rubab and the Uzbek Qashqar rubab are related, but they are different instruments, and their technical systems and repertoires must not be treated as the same thing.

Organological and Musical Characteristics of the Rubab

Any teaching method has to start from the instrument itself. The Qashqar rubab is a plucked string instrument played with a plectrum, and the character of its sound is determined by its construction, the arrangement of the strings, its resonance and the way it is played.

These features make specific demands on the learner. To begin with, the student has to learn to control the plectrum and to find a precise relationship between the right hand and the strings. The left hand, in turn, must become flexible enough for melodic movement, changes of position and ornamental passages. And finally the two hands have to work together while the rhythm stays steady and the sound remains even. The teacher brings in these elements one at a time, making sure that technique serves musical expression rather than the other way round. We consider the first stage decisive, since it lays the physical and technical groundwork for everything that follows.

The first lessons are best spent on the position of the instrument and of the player's body. The teacher shows how to sit in a balanced way, how to support the rubab comfortably and how to avoid needless tension. A poor posture very quickly makes itself felt: the plectrum becomes harder to control, and complex passages start to break down.

Plectrum technique is at the heart of rubab teaching. At the beginning the student practises simple downstrokes and upstrokes on single strings. These exercises train coordination, rhythmic precision and an even attack.

We recommend the following order:

1. single strokes on open strings;
2. alternating downstrokes and upstrokes;
3. repeated rhythmic patterns;
4. moving between neighbouring strings;
5. simple melodic exercises;
6. a gradual increase in tempo.

What matters at every step is the quality of each sound, not speed alone.

Work with the left hand begins with basic finger placement and simple melodic exercises. The student needs clean intonation, controlled finger pressure and smooth connections between notes. Intervals, scales, repeated notes and short melodic passages are then added little by little.

Coordination between the plectrum and the left hand comes only with steady practice. A method that works well is to split a difficult passage into small units, practise the movements of each hand separately and then put them together. Students play more accurately this way, and there is less unnecessary strain.

Development of Technical and Artistic Competencies

Technical skill and musical interpretation should grow side by side. It is quite possible to play a passage accurately and still miss its expressive character.

Rubab teaching therefore has to cover several competencies:

- sound production and control of timbre;
- articulation with the plectrum;
- rhythmic accuracy;
- melodic phrasing;
- dynamic contrast;
- ornamentation;
- stylistic interpretation;
- musical memory.

One principle we hold to firmly is that technical exercises should come out of the repertoire. A given plectrum exercise is chosen because it helps with a difficulty the student has met in a particular piece. When exercises are chosen this way, technical work makes sense to the student, and what has been learned carries over more easily into performance.

Repertoire-Based Teaching

In rubab education, repertoire is one of the main tools of professional growth. Pieces should be chosen according to the student's technical level, musical experience and artistic maturity. A well-planned repertoire lets the student build skills step by step while getting to know different styles and performance traditions.

At the elementary level we suggest short pieces with simple rhythmic and melodic structures. They develop basic plectrum coordination, fingering, a steady rhythm and control of the sound. In the intermediate years students should move to music that asks for more technical control, more complex rhythms, ornaments and expressive phrasing. At the advanced level the repertoire should include large traditional compositions, concert pieces, ensemble works and arrangements, music that demands technical independence and a mature interpretation.

Working on repertoire also means understanding how the instrument produces its sound. Abdurashidova (2025), writing on methods of sound production and their notation in dutor playing, draws attention to the connection between instrumental technique and the character of the sound that results. Her study is about the dutor, but the same principle holds for the rubab. Students should learn to hear how different plectrum movements, kinds of articulation and ways of producing sound change the expressive quality of a piece. Repertoire, then, should be chosen so that these techniques can be developed in gradually more demanding musical contexts.

Students should also meet different regional performance traditions, and comparative listening is very useful for this. They can listen to several versions of the same piece and note differences in tempo, articulation, phrasing, ornamentation and overall character. Through such work they come to see that a traditional piece allows more than one reading and still keeps its essential stylistic features.

The value of a wider view is also visible in the study by Makharov et al. (2025) on cooperation between Uzbek and Kuwaiti composers. The authors show how musical exchange can enrich creative approaches and open a dialogue between traditions. In the rubab class this idea can be brought in through carefully selected arrangements and comparative repertoire, so that students can see how traditional instrumental expression may interact with other musical cultures.

Teaching through repertoire should thus combine technical progression, knowledge of style and room for creative interpretation. Students then not only cope with more and more demanding pieces but also build a thoughtful relationship with their national musical heritage and with what it can become today.

Traditional and Academic Teaching Approaches

The traditional *ustoz-shogird* system still matters a great deal in rubab teaching. Musical knowledge is passed on in it through direct demonstration and practical participation. Baily's research shows that in traditional musical cultures learning an instrument is closely bound up with imitation, listening and a gradual entry into performance (Baily, 1988).

Academic education adds its own structures: notation, technical exercises, theoretical analysis and formal assessment. We do not see these as opposed to the traditional system; the two should be joined.

In practice, a productive model of teaching brings together:

- direct demonstration by the teacher;
- individual technical work;
- transmission of traditional repertoire;
- music notation;
- analytical listening;
- ensemble playing;
- public performance.

Students should also be helped to understand the cultural context of the music they play.

Individualized Instruction

Students differ in physical ability, previous musical experience, speed of learning and artistic taste, so no single teaching strategy will suit all of them equally. Saitov, writing on rubab teaching, likewise stresses the need for an individual approach and for adapting instruction to each student's stage of development (Saitov, 2025).

In everyday teaching this can mean different technical exercises, different practice tempos, other choices of repertoire and specific tasks for home practice. A student who has trouble controlling the plectrum, for instance, needs more rhythmic and coordination exercises, whereas a technically strong student may be ready for more demanding interpretive work.

Conclusion

Teaching the rubab requires a methodological system in which traditional performance knowledge and modern academic instruction work together. Its main components are correct posture, controlled plectrum technique, accurate fingering, coordination of the hands, rhythmic development, work on repertoire and artistic interpretation.

The traditional *ustoz-shogird* approach remains the basis for passing on stylistic knowledge, while academic methods supply systematic technical and theoretical preparation.

The approach described here places weight on individual work with each student and on a close link between technical exercises and the pieces being studied.

Rubab teaching, in the end, should aim at more than the accurate reproduction of written music. Students need to learn to understand, interpret and convey, in their own way, the artistic qualities of Uzbek traditional music.

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