



WORLD BULLETIN  
PUBLISHING  
Online Publishing Hub

# World Bulletin of Education and Learning (WBEL)

ISSN (E): 3072-175X

Volume 01, Issue 02, November 2025



This article/work is licensed under CC by 4.0 Attribution

<https://worldbulletin.org/index.php/1>

## THEORETICAL ASPECTS OF TRADITIONAL UZBEK VOCAL ART

Xasan Rajabiy

Professor of the Associate Professor of the Department of  
Maqom Singing of the Institute of Uzbek National Music Art  
Named After Yunus Rajabi

### Abstract

This article explores the theoretical foundations of traditional Uzbek vocal art, focusing on its modal system, regional schools, pedagogical practices, and expressive techniques. Rooted in the centuries-old maqom tradition, Uzbek vocal performance integrates complex modal structures, rhythmic patterns, and poetic expression. This study analyzes the specific characteristics of Uzbek maqom, the oral transmission system via the master-apprentice relationship, and the regional stylistic variations in performance. Drawing on ethnomusicological research and comparative musicology, this paper aims to present a comprehensive theoretical framework that highlights the unique features of Uzbek traditional singing within the broader context of Central Asian music heritage.

**Keywords:** Uzbek vocal art, maqom, oral tradition, master-apprentice, modal system, rhythmic patterns, ethnomusicology.

### Introduction

Traditional Uzbek vocal art, known as *xonandalik*, represents one of the highest forms of musical expression in Uzbekistan, deeply embedded in its cultural and historical identity. This art form is characterized not only by vocal virtuosity but also by a profound understanding of complex modal systems (*maqom*), rhythmic cycles (*usul*), and poetic narratives. The Uzbek maqom tradition, part of the greater Central Asian maqom family, stands out for its intricate theoretical frameworks and emotional depth.



Shashmaqom consists of a collection of melodies and songs adapted to and based on six different modes. Although the modal basis of Shashmaqom has six variations, melodies corresponding to other similar modes have also been incorporated. This is especially evident in the melodies of maqom branches. In them, not only the tonality, but also the modal structure changes in relation to the main mode to which they belong. [4.347-b.]


Understanding the theoretical underpinnings of *xonandalik* is essential for preserving this intangible cultural heritage and for its scholarly study. This article focuses on the modal and rhythmic structures of Uzbek maqom, regional vocal schools, pedagogical methods based on oral transmission, and the art's expressive techniques. It also highlights the importance of the master-apprentice relationship in maintaining the continuity of this tradition.

## 2. Theoretical Foundations: The Maqom System and Modal Structures

At the heart of Uzbek vocal art lies the *maqom* system—a sophisticated modal framework that governs melodic development and emotional expression. The *maqom* comprises several components:

- **Shuba (Modal Structure):** The scale or mode defining the pitch set and microtonal intervals used in performance. Uzbek maqoms often include intervals smaller than the Western semitone, such as neutral seconds and thirds, reflecting an ancient modal heritage (Racy, 2003).
- **Usul (Rhythmic Pattern):** The cyclical metric patterns that structure the temporal flow of the music. These rhythmic cycles vary from simple to complex and serve as a foundation for vocal and instrumental improvisation (Nettl, 2005).
- **Avj (Climax):** The moment of highest emotional intensity within a *maqom* performance, often marked by increased vocal intensity and melodic complexity (Nettl, 1987).

The Uzbek *Shashmaqom* tradition, in particular, consists of six main *maqoms* (Buzruk, Rost, Navo, Dugoh, Segah, and Iroq), each subdivided into formal sections such as *peshrev*, *tasnif*, *mushkilot*, and *nazr* (Bakan, 2012). The vocal performer must master these structures theoretically and practically, allowing for improvisational freedom within strict modal rules.

 <b>WORLD BULLETIN PUBLISHING</b> Online Publishing Hub	<h1>World Bulletin of Education and Learning (WBEL)</h1>
<b>ISSN (E): 3072-175X</b>	<b>Volume 01, Issue 02, November 2025</b>
	This article/work is licensed under CC by 4.0 Attribution
<a href="https://worldbulletin.org/index.php/1">https://worldbulletin.org/index.php/1</a>	

### 3. Regional Vocal Schools in Uzbekistan

Uzbek vocal art exhibits regional variations in style, technique, and interpretation, reflected in the three primary schools of *xonandalik*:

- **Bukhara School:** Known for its solemn and refined interpretation of *Shashmaqom*, emphasizing slow tempos and deep philosophical content. Performers from this school pay meticulous attention to vocal timbre and articulation, often integrating Sufi poetic themes (Levy, 1989).
- **Khorezm School:** This school favors more dynamic and rhythmically vibrant performances, integrating folk idioms with classical maqom forms. Khorezm singers often employ greater improvisational freedom and ornamentation (Nazarov, 2007).
- **Fergana-Tashkent School:** Combining elements of classical *maqom* with contemporary performance practices, this school adapts traditional vocal techniques for modern concert settings, balancing preservation and innovation (Sadykov, 2015).

Each regional school contributes to the richness of Uzbek vocal art, underscoring the diversity of interpretations within the overarching theoretical framework of the *maqom* tradition.

### 4. Pedagogical Approaches: The Master-Apprentice Tradition

The transmission of Uzbek vocal art relies heavily on the *ustoz-shogird* (master-apprentice) system, a pedagogical model characterized by oral transmission, imitation, and direct mentorship. This system emphasizes:

- **Oral Learning:** Apprentices memorize *maqoms* and poetic texts through attentive listening and repetition, fostering deep internalization of modal and rhythmic patterns (Daring, 1991).
- **Experiential Knowledge:** The apprentice learns not only technique but also the emotional and spiritual dimensions of performance by observing the master's expressiveness and interpretative choices (Nettl, 1987).

 <b>WORLD BULLETIN PUBLISHING</b> <small>Online Publishing Hub</small>	<h1>World Bulletin of Education and Learning (WBEL)</h1>
<b>ISSN (E): 3072-175X</b>	<b>Volume 01, Issue 02, November 2025</b>
	This article/work is licensed under CC by 4.0 Attribution
<a href="https://worldbulletin.org/index.php/1">https://worldbulletin.org/index.php/1</a>	

- **Creative Autonomy:** While rooted in tradition, this method encourages gradual development of individual style and improvisational skills under the master’s guidance.

Despite modern formal music education systems emerging in Uzbekistan, the *ustoz-shogird* relationship remains central in cultivating authentic vocal artistry.

### 5. Rhythmic and Modal Specificity: Expressive Dimensions

Uzbek vocal art is distinguished by its use of microtonal intervals and complex rhythmic cycles, which shape the emotional landscape of performance. For example:

- The use of **neutral seconds** and **microtonal inflections** enables nuanced emotional expression that Western equal temperament cannot replicate (Levy, 1989).
- Rhythmic cycles such as “**Saqil**” and “**Zarb-i Muqaddima**” provide a flexible yet structured temporal framework supporting vocal ornamentation and phrasing (Nazarov, 2007).
- The dynamic relationship between steady rhythmic pulses and vocal improvisation creates tension and release, essential for conveying the narrative and affective content of *maqoms*.

Mastery of these elements requires theoretical knowledge combined with years of practice within the *ustoz-shogird* system.

### 6. Conclusion

Traditional Uzbek vocal art, grounded in the *maqom* modal system and preserved through the *ustoz-shogird* pedagogical model, represents a profound cultural and musical heritage. Its theoretical complexity, regional diversity, and expressive depth make it a vital area of study within ethnomusicology and Central Asian musicology.

Future research should continue exploring the interaction between oral traditions and formal music education, the impact of globalization on Uzbek vocal styles, and the integration of modern technologies in preserving this intangible cultural heritage.



**WORLD BULLETIN  
PUBLISHING**  
Online Publishing Hub

# World Bulletin of Education and Learning (WBEL)

ISSN (E): 3072-175X

Volume 01, Issue 02, November 2025



This article/work is licensed under CC by 4.0 Attribution

<https://worldbulletin.org/index.php/1>

## References

1. Ulmasovich, R. U. (2025). O‘zbek mumtozmusiqasi merosining milliy va umumbashariy qadryatlari. *France-Scientific Review of the Problems and Prospects of Modern Science and Education*, 1(3), 8-13.
2. Yuldashev, M. U. (2025). Sharq musiqamadaniyatining pedagogikasi va uning yoshlar tafakkurida aks etishi. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15389746>
3. Mamatqulov, M. M. (2025). Yoshlar tafakkurini rivojlantirish va ma’naviyatini oshirishda o‘zbek milliy musiqasi san’atining o‘rni. *Scientific Review of the Problems and Prospects of Modern Science and Education (Great Britain)*.
4. Karimova, M. (2025). Shashmaqom cholg‘u qismlarining ijrochiligi. *Modern Science and Research*, 4(3), 1002–1008.
5. Borieva, K. R., & Burieva, K. R. (2022). Мақоморында дағы ән дауыстары: Певческие голоса в исполнении макомов. In XXI ғасырдағы түркіхалықтарының ұлттық орындаушылық өнері: зерттеу (р. 244).
6. Yuldasheva, F. D. (2020). Инструмент народа – дутор. *Проблемы современной науки и образования*, (7 (152)), 106-108.
7. Matyakubov, Sh. B. (2022). Достижения и недостатки макомного образования с использованием современных технологий в традиции наставничества. *Проблемы современной науки и образования*, (2 (171)), 92-94.