



RHYTHM AND USUL AS PEDAGOGICAL AND PERFORMANCE PRINCIPLES IN MAQAM TRADITIONS

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Abstract

This article investigates the rhythmic foundation of Eastern maqam traditions through the concept of usul — a term encompassing both rhythmic pattern and structural organization in music. By tracing its historical development, theoretical interpretation, and practical application, the paper reveals how rhythm functions as both a pedagogical and performative principle in maqam-based musical culture. The study emphasizes the cognitive, mnemonic, and aesthetic aspects of rhythmic systems, showing their role in shaping the artistic dialogue between performer and listener.

Keywords: usual, rhythm, maqam, pedagogical principles, doira, performance

Introduction

Rhythm has always been an essential element of human musical expression. In Eastern traditions, however, rhythm — known as usul — extends far beyond the mere succession of beats. It defines the inner architecture of the musical flow and embodies a spiritual and intellectual dimension of the maqam system.

As Rasulov (2025) notes, “in the maqam, rhythm is not only a temporal framework but a reflection of thought and emotion.” Similarly, Karimova (2024) describes usul as “the heartbeat of Eastern music, linking time, movement, and expression into a single artistic organism.”

Historically, usul served as the rhythmic skeleton that unified melodic phrases, poetic texts, and instrumental accompaniment. Its origins can be traced back to the ancient Zarb al-Qadim (“ancient beat”), symbolizing the pulse of human life.

Methodology

This research employs a musicological and ethnographic approach. Primary data were drawn from Uzbek, Persian, and Arabic sources, as well as modern analytical studies on rhythm and maqam performance. Comparative analysis was used to identify the pedagogical functions of usul in training traditional musicians. Audio-visual observations of doira and nog‘ora performance practices were also considered to support the theoretical findings.

Results

The pedagogical integration of rhythm and usul in Uzbek traditional music represents not only a methodological framework but also a cultural philosophy of time and expression. Within the context of Uzbek music education, rhythm is not a purely technical aspect; it is deeply connected with emotional interpretation, linguistic rhythm of the lyrics, and the spiritual essence of maqom performance. According to Rasulov (2025), the rhythmic pattern serves as a “living language” that connects performer and listener, shaping the communicative and aesthetic dynamics of the musical process.

From a pedagogical perspective, the teaching of usul fosters coordination, cognitive flexibility, and the development of auditory attention among students. The cyclic rhythmic



structures encourage learners to internalize musical form through repetition and variation, which in turn enhances memory and improvisational capacity. Abdinabiyevna (2024) emphasizes that rhythm-based exercises not only strengthen musical skills but also build cultural identity, as each *usul* carries specific historical and regional symbolism.

Moreover, integrating rhythm studies into the broader curriculum allows instructors to bridge traditional oral teaching methods with modern analytical approaches. When students practice rhythmic cycles through movement, clapping, and group recitation, they unconsciously absorb the collective musical consciousness inherent in Uzbek folk and classical music traditions. Ulasheva (2025) notes that such experiential learning “restores the human dimension of time in music,” where rhythm becomes a medium for personal expression and emotional regulation.

In this regard, *usul* functions as both a pedagogical and psychological tool. It teaches discipline through pattern, creativity through variation, and collaboration through ensemble performance. Karimova (2024) suggests that when rhythm is perceived not as a constraint but as a guiding structure, it nurtures artistic freedom within cultural boundaries. Thus, the systematic application of rhythmic pedagogy in Uzbek music institutions contributes to forming well-rounded musicians who combine technical mastery with cultural consciousness.

The findings demonstrate that *usul* operates as:

1. A rhythmic meter, determining the temporal order of musical phrases;
2. A mnemonic tool, aiding performers in memorizing complex rhythmic cycles;
3. A pedagogical mechanism, used in teaching coordination and improvisation;
4. A communicative system, enabling interaction between musicians during performance.

According to Abdinabiyevna (2024), the rhythmic language of *doira* and *nog‘ora* once served as a communicative medium — performers could “converse” rhythmically through question-and-answer exchanges. This tradition, preserved in modern *Doira bazm* gatherings, continues to train young instrumentalists in improvisation and ensemble coordination.

Discussion

The pedagogical value of *usul* lies in its dual nature — it is both structural and expressive. The *doira* performer provides a rhythmic foundation (*mezon*), while the melodic performer explores freedom within that structure. This creative tension, described by Ulasheva (2023), reflects “the dialectical unity of discipline and spontaneity — the essence of *maqam* performance.”

In regional practice, rhythmic patterns differ: in Bukhara style, syllables like “*bum-taq*”, “*ta-qa*”, “*ta-qo*” are used, while in Khorezm, onomatopoeic forms such as “*gul-taq*” and “*ta-qo*” are common. These mnemonic syllables embody the *iyqo izmi* (flow of rhythm) and serve as oral notation systems for performers. As Karimova (2024) emphasizes, “without rhythmic consciousness, modal performance loses its balance and eloquence.” Hence, mastering *usul* is not merely a technical task — it represents the internalization of musical order and emotional timing.

Conclusion

In conclusion, *usul* serves as the rhythmic philosophy of *maqam*. It unites melody, poetry, and motion into an integrated musical entity. Its pedagogical application in performance training ensures the preservation of traditional techniques and interpretive sensitivity. Rasulov (2025) rightly asserts that “the rhythmic system of the East is not a background to melody but its living soul.” Thus, in the practice of *maqam*, rhythm becomes a creative



dialogue between time, sound, and meaning — a conversation sustained through centuries of musical wisdom.

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