

# Cheerleading – A Tool to Achieve Wellness Culture in the Bulgarian School

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**Abstract:** *Cheerleading is an interactive tool to motivate young people to a wellness lifestyle. In the subject of physical education and sports they can be practiced as an extracurricular form of education. They contribute to the physical, aesthetic, musical, dance and intellectual development of students. Wellness indicators contribute to a sustainable emotional state with a cheerful, creative spirit, which supports the construction of a positive and stimulating work environment. School Wellness is regulated by the 9<sup>th</sup> key competence of the student in the Law on Preschool and School Education.*

**Key words:** Cheerleading, Baton twirling, recreational physical activity, healthy programs, Wellness at school

**Ключови думи:** Мажоретни спортове, въртене на палка, рекреативна физическа активност, здравословни програми, училищен уелнес



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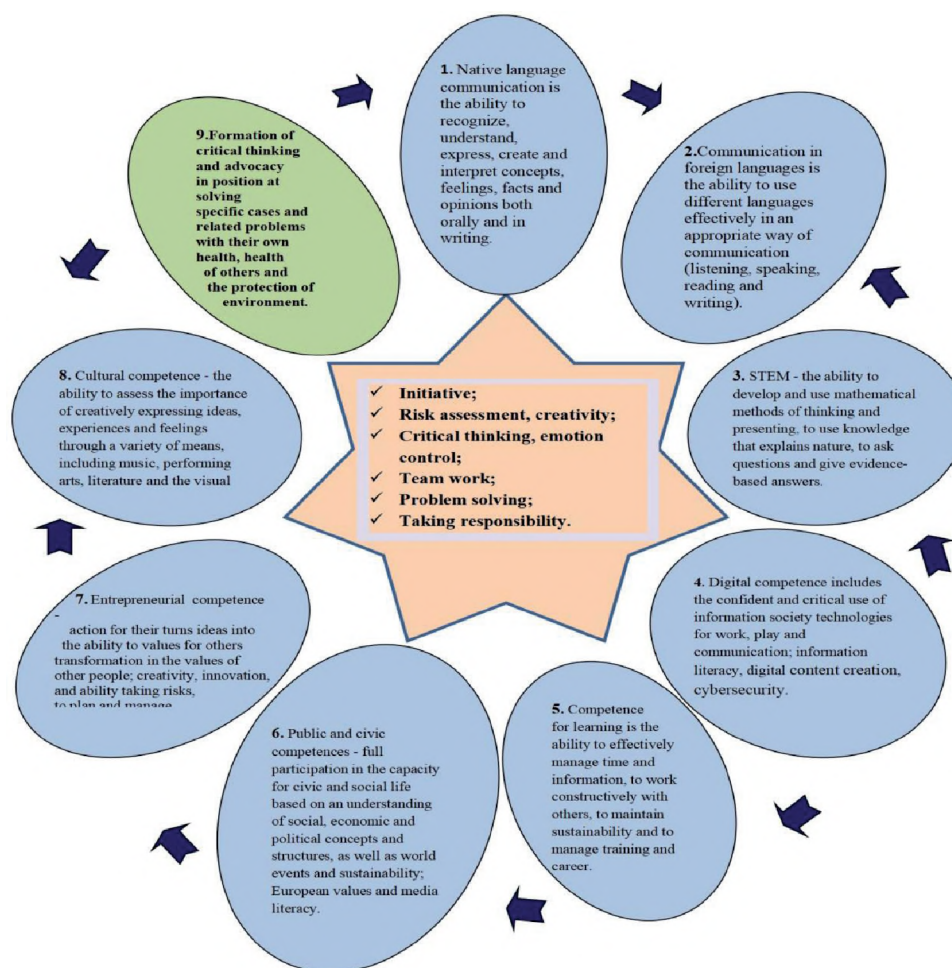
## INTRODUCTION

The most important key to understanding and realizing a wellness model of life lies in realizing, understanding and approving it as a philosophical concept<sup>1</sup>. New educational 'programs for Wellness culture' are being developed to increase the quality of services in the Recreational Industry as a whole<sup>2,3</sup>. Therefore, global organizations such as the UN, WHO, Global Wellness Institute, Balkan Cluster for Health, Wellness and Spa Tourism, the Water Health Cluster Platform, Wellness Institute Bulgaria regularly study and publish analyzes of trends in the wellness industry and the Recreational activities<sup>4,5,6</sup>. The UN annually publishes its annual report on the state of global indices for Wellbeing and Happy Planet<sup>7,8</sup>.

Cheerleading is an interactive tool to motivate young people to a wellness lifestyle. In the subject of physical education and sports, they can be practiced as an extracurricular form of education. In her dissertation, Minkovska<sup>9</sup> notes that physical activity in sports is strictly regulated by principles, rules and requirements. That is why sports and entertainment inevitably and effortlessly affect the personality of those involved, forms behavioral qualities. Regular classes successfully cultivate strong-willed and moral qualities such as perseverance, perseverance, diligence,

discipline, resourcefulness, initiative, tolerance and more. Cheerleading sports contribute to the physical, aesthetic, musical, dance and intellectual development of students. In general, the above indicators contribute to a stable emotional state with a cheerful, creative spirit, which supports the construction of a positive and stimulating work environment. Cheerleading is a team sport with elements of acrobatics and gymnastics, with choreography and geometric formations through dance steps and cultivates harmony, psychological balance, teamwork, diligence (through the repeated

method). It is an affordable recreational tool and can be practiced by all age groups, including disadvantaged people. Cheerleading sports are partially represented in Bulgarian schools, but their expanded entry as an extracurricular form of activity will help to achieve wellness culture in the school environment. This is regulated by the ninth key competence (**Scheme 1**) in the Secondary Education Act: 'Knowledge and skills for sustainable development and implementation of a healthy lifestyle and sports'<sup>10</sup>.



**Scheme 1.** Ninth key competence in the Secondary Education Act

<sup>1</sup> Dimitrova et al. 2018: 89-104.

<sup>2</sup> Dimitrova et al. 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Donev et al. 2019: 370.

<sup>4</sup> Trendafilov, Dimitrova 2013: 468.

<sup>5</sup> Dimitrova 2017: 406-410.

<sup>6</sup> Chalakov 2020.

<sup>7</sup> Dimitrova et al. 2020: 34-36.

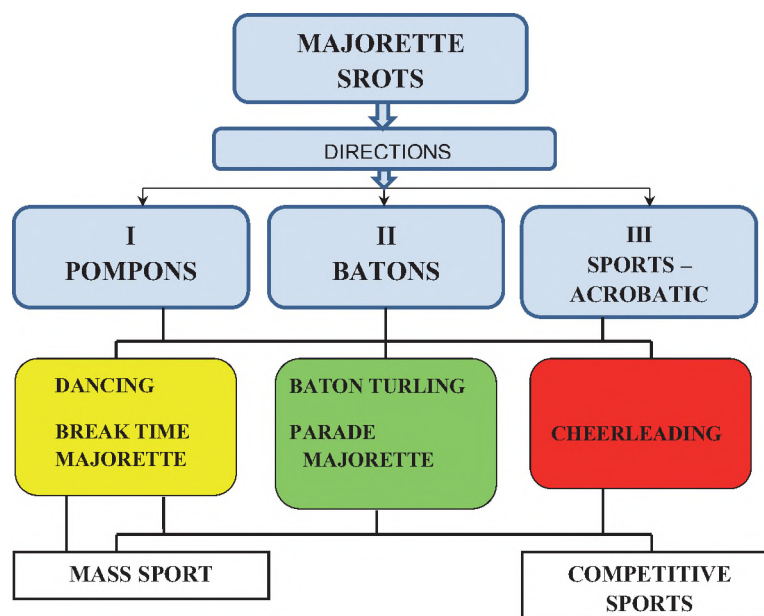
<sup>8</sup> Dimitrova et al. 2021: 58-60.

<sup>9</sup> Minkovska 2021: 68.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.lex.bg/bg/laws/ldoc/2136641509>; <https://mon.bg> › upload › I-book

The popularity of cheerleading is constantly growing not only in America but also in Europe, which implies a constant search for new ideas and opportunities for development such as: choreographic, motor and wellness culture<sup>11</sup>. Historical facts can be traced on the official website of the International Cheerleading Union [<http://cheerunion.eu>]<sup>12</sup>. The chronological development of Cheerleading disciplines as a motor and sports-competitive activity from its creation to the present day is systematized in a dissertation<sup>13</sup>. In its evolutionary development, cheerleading reached an officially recognized sport in the United States in the late 1970s, and by the early 1990s it had gone beyond America. As an entertaining wellness activity, they are characterized by a long and rich

history. Their historical dynamics date from 1860 to the present day. The interest in cheerleading at school is also caused by the opportunity to participate in sports formats such as DP, EP and SP in Cheerleading, and after 2022 with the opportunity to participate in the Olympics. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, at the 138<sup>th</sup> session of the IOC, held on July 20 and 21, 2021 (according to the BCS<sup>14</sup>) on the eve of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Olympic Games in Tokyo (canceled for the summer of 2021), the discipline Cheerleading was approved as a full-fledged member of the Olympic program. From foreign and our experience<sup>15</sup> we find that cheerleading sports can be conditionally classified into three areas by direction, type of equipment and degree of difficulty (**Scheme 2**).



**Scheme 2.** *Cheerleading sports classified according to specifics and characteristics*

With their extremely characteristic specifics, dynamism and spectacle, cheerleading sports are persistently entering the school system of mass sports. They are practiced by young people in school halls or sport halls and are realized in sports-training and competition activities on several

continents<sup>16</sup>. The international categorization (by BCS) presented in **Table 1** informs about the categories in cheerleading, age range and levels of security (preparedness) in Cheerleading, and in Baton twirling according to age the competition category is determined.

<sup>11</sup> Nesheva 2010.

<sup>12</sup> <http://cheerunion.eu> – European Cheer Union.

<sup>13</sup> Minkovska 2021: 69.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.bulcu.eu>

<sup>15</sup> Nesheva 2016.

<sup>16</sup> Minkovska, 2017.

Table 1. Categorization for cheerleading and baton twirling

CATEGORY CHEERLEADING	AGE IN THE YEAR OF THE COMPETITION	SECURITY LEVELS
<b>Tiny</b>	<b>from 5 to 8 years</b>	<b>Level 1 (Novice)</b>
<b>Mini</b>	<b>from 7 to 13 years</b>	<b>Level 2 (Intermediate)</b>
<b>Youth</b>	<b>from 9 to 13 years</b>	<b>Level 3 (Median)</b>
<b>Junior</b>	<b>from 11 to 16 years</b>	<b>Level 4 (Advanced)</b>
<b>Junior (International)</b>	<b>from 12 to 16 years</b>	<b>Level 5 (Elite)</b>
<b>Senior (International)</b>	<b>over 14 years</b>	<b>Level 5 (Elite)</b>
<b>Senior (International)</b>	<b>over 15 years</b>	<b>Level 6 (Premier)</b>
CATEGORY BATON TOURING	AGE IN THE YEAR OF THE COMPETITION	
<b>Mini children</b>	<b>up to 8 years</b>	
<b>Children</b>	<b>from 9 to 11 years</b>	
<b>Boys and girls</b>	<b>from 12 to 16 years</b>	
<b>Women and men</b>	<b>over 14 years</b>	
<b>Women and men (Cheerleading Premier)</b>	<b>over 15 years</b>	

## RESULTS

It can be summarized that the indicated trends related to the development of cheerleading sports by disciplines and categories are an expression of multidimensional motor activity, which makes them socially significant.

## METHODOLOGY

The aim of the research is to prove the existence of wellness practices in Bulgarian schools. 13 competitions in the period 2007-2021 were analyzed, and the 14<sup>th</sup> was not held due to the global pandemic situation. Rankings of Bulgarian teams are systematized to establish the level of development and international positioning of Bulgarian athletes. The number of medals and prizes won is illustrated. The dynamics of the sports result is analyzed. The following theoretical and empirical research methods are applied: systematic analysis of literary and online sources, oral research (interview, talk) with specialists and coaches of cheerleading teams, monitoring (monitoring, tracking and summarizing) of sports results. Cheerleading sports, as an out-of-class form of learning, are an interactive tool for achieving wellness and a stimulating work environment.

The Republic of Bulgaria became part of the Global World Federation NBTA EUROPA in 2007 – 2008 [<http://www.nbta-europe.info/>]. The ranking reflected in **Table 2** characterizes the active cheerleading activity of Baton twirling of all Bulgarian cheerleading groups described below. The first start in 2007 in Ribnick, Slovenia was set by a cheerleading team from Shumen, which represents our country at the European Championships, as the first Bulgarian national team in cheerleading sports, in which the team took 6<sup>th</sup> place in the 'Accessory Corps' category. This marks the beginning of Bulgarian participation in a major sports forum – European Championship. From 2007 to 2011, Bulgaria is a worthy participant in cheerleading with a ranking of one 2<sup>nd</sup>, one 4<sup>th</sup>, one 5<sup>th</sup> place and two 6<sup>th</sup> places. After years of hard work and training in 2012, a cheerleading team from Svilengrad entered with bronze medals won at the European Baton twirling Championship, held in Celestat, France in the period 05.10.2012 – 07.10.2012. They achieved the prestigious ranking in the discipline 'Traditional Corps' – 3<sup>rd</sup> place. The girls participate in the category 'Parade Corps', in which they take 6<sup>th</sup> place. The competition includes teams from 11 countries, including Bulgaria, England, the Czech Republic, Croatia, France, Norway and others (**Table 2**).

Table 2. Ranking of Bulgaria at the EP by Baton Twirling and Cheerleaders

BULGARIA - EUROPEAN BATTON TURLING AND MAJORETTE CHAMPIONSHIPS				
2007	2009	2010	2011	2012
<b>Ribnica, SLOVENIA</b>	<b>Split, CROATIA</b>	<b>Sniffer, SWITZERLAND</b>	<b>Bat, ENGLAND</b>	<b>Celestat, FRANCE</b>
<b>VI place</b> Rhythmic (junior) A.c	<b>V place</b> Rhythmic (junior) T.c  <b>VI place</b> Rhythmic (junior) E.c	<b>IV place</b> Rhythmic (junior) T.c	<b>II place</b> Rhythmic (junior) T.c	<b>III place</b> Rhythmic (junior) T.c  <b>III place</b> Rhythmic (junior) E.c  <b>VI place</b> Izida (juveniles) P.c
			<b>1 silver</b>	<b>2 bronze</b>
2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
<b>Lillehammer, NORWAY</b>	<b>Slavonski Brod, CROATIA</b>	<b>Lignano Sabbiadoro, ITALY</b>	<b>Crowley, ENGLAND</b>	<b>Almere, NETHERLANDS</b>
<b>I place</b> Rhythmic (junior) T.c  <b>III place</b> Rhythmic (junior) P.c  <b>III place</b> Rhythmic (juveniles) T.c	<b>IV place</b> Rhythmic (junior) T.c  <b>VI place</b> Izida (juveniles) T.c	<b>II place</b> Rhythmic (junior) T.c  <b>IV place</b> Izida (juveniles) T.c	<b>III place</b> Rhythmic (junior) T.c  <b>III place</b> Izida (juveniles) T.c	<b>II place</b> New bazar (junior) P.c  <b>III place</b> Izida (juveniles) P.c  <b>III place</b> Rhythmic (junior) T.c  <b>IV place</b> Izida (juveniles) T.c
<b>1 gold &amp; 2 bronze</b>		<b>1 silver</b>	<b>2 bronze</b>	<b>1 silver &amp; 2 bronze</b>
2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
<b>Poreč, CROATIA</b>	<b>Lignano Sabbiadoro, ITALY</b>	No European Championship was held. The reason - COVID 19	<b>Poreč, CROATIA</b>	Upcoming competitions!
<b>II place</b> Rhythmic (junior) T.p  <b>III place</b> Rhythmic (junior) (B&f)  <b>III place</b> Izida (juveniles) T.c  <b>III place</b> Izida (juveniles) E.c	<b>I place</b> Rhythmic (junior) T.p  <b>I place</b> New bazar (junior) E.c  <b>II place</b> Rhythmic (junior) P.c  <b>II place</b> New bazar (junior) P.c  <b>III place</b> Izida (juveniles) P.c  <b>III place</b> Rhythmic (junior) T.c		<b>II place</b> Rhythmic (junior) POM  <b>III + III place</b> New bazar (junior) B&f + E.c  <b>III place</b> Izida (juveniles) T.c	
<b>1 silver &amp; 3 bronze</b>	<b>2 gold, 2 silver, 2 bronze</b>		<b>1 silver &amp; 3 bronze</b>	

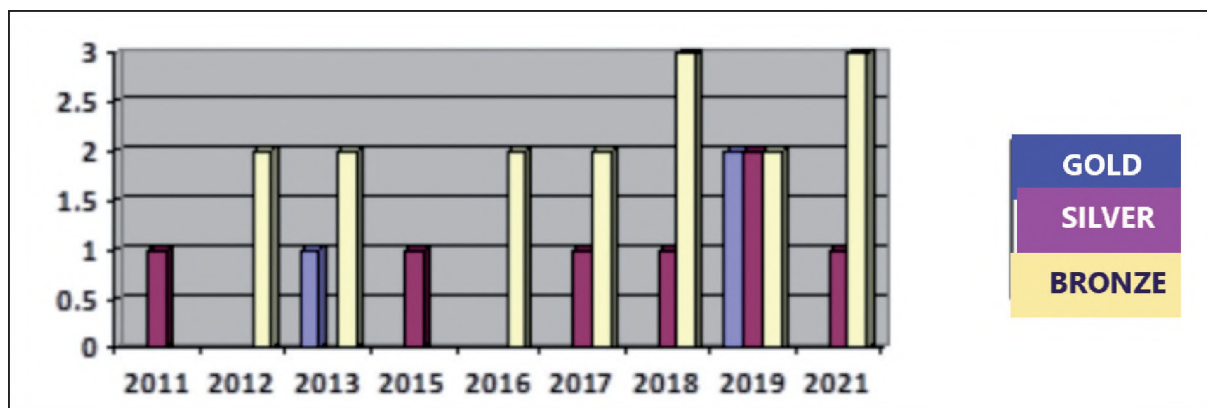
**Legend:** Baton Twirling and Cheerleaders – (AK) – Accessory Corps; (Tk) Traditional building; (Pk) Parade Corps; (Ek) Exhibition Corps; (Tp) Traditional pompoms; (juveniles) – minors; (junior – j.) – younger age; (Pom) – pompoms; (I – VI m) – from first to sixth place

From 2013 to 2016, Bulgaria won a total of 1st, one 2<sup>nd</sup>, one 5<sup>th</sup> place, four 3<sup>rd</sup> and two 4<sup>th</sup> places. The third participant from Bulgaria at the EP in the Netherlands in 2017 is a cheerleading group from the town of Novi Pazar in the category 'Parade Corps (Junior)' which occupies the prestigious 2nd place with a total of one for Bulgaria, 2nd and two 3rd places for Svilengrad in the categories (Juveniles) 'Parade Corps' and Shumen (Junior) in the 'Traditional Corps'. The European Championship in Porec, Croatia in 2018, Bulgaria registered one silver and three bronze medals in various categories in Baton Twirling. The two years' period (2018 – 2019) is one of the strongest for Bulgaria and is characterized

by the best performance and the most titles won, including gold medals – first place for the cheerleading team from Shumen in junior and category 'Traditional pompoms' and first place for the cheerleaders of Novi Pazar in the junior level and category 'Exhibition Corps' (Table 1, p. 5). In 2020, no sporting events took place due to the measures imposed by COVID 19. The 24<sup>th</sup> European Baton Twirling and Cheerleading Championships were held on 20, 21 and 22 October 2021 in Poreč, Croatia. Despite the difficult year and the tense situation around COVID 19, the EP was successfully held with participants from several countries – Bulgaria, Italy, Romania, Russia, Slovenia, France, Croatia and the Czech Republic. The national team of

Bulgaria was represented by the towns of Shumen, Svilengrad, Novi Pazar and Haskovo in different categories – Baton flag team, Traditional Majorettes corps, Parade corps, Traditional Pompons, Show Twirl Accessories corps, Exhibition corps (**Table 1**). In the strong competition between the Bulgarian participants and the advanced countries with many

years of experience in this cheerleading sport, Bulgaria returns with one 2<sup>nd</sup>, three 3<sup>rd</sup> and two 4<sup>th</sup> places in different ages and categories. The number of medals won for Bulgaria in Baton Twirling and Cheerleaders in the period from 2011 to 2021 is a total of 26, of which 3 gold, 7 silver and 16 bronze, presented in **Figure 1**.



**Figure 1.** Number of medals won in Bulgaria by years from sports clubs

This analysis allows conclusions to be drawn about the benefits of achieving not only wellness culture but also well-being. The established and analyzed results contribute to placing the management of the pedagogical process on a scientific basis, which will guarantee their quality. The possibilities for objectification through the introduction of cheerleading in the system of school physical education are taken into account. Wellness culture is achieved by practicing and defining a model for attracting and motivating students and young people to practice cheerleading. We applied modern methods for data analysis by author's methodology<sup>17</sup>.

## DISCUSSION

School education is related to the intensity of curricula, which implies maintaining high

performance and motivation of students through participation in various sports and motor activities. Cheerleading sports contribute to the formation of knowledge and competencies of the participants and to the image of the respective Bulgarian school. They have social, emotional and physical-psychological significance and in parallel with Olympic sports such as acrobatics, gymnastics and synchronized swimming they are defined as modern tools for social realization and public expression of talented young people from 1860 to the present day. In many Bulgarian towns (Shumen, Svilengrad, Pazardzhik, Novi Pazar, Burgas, Varna, Vratsa, Stara Zagora and many others), in community centers, sports clubs and school halls are organized classes in cheerleading, mostly practiced the disciplines Baton twirling and Cheerleaders (**Block photo 1**).



**Block photo 1.** Cheerleaders from the past and present with specific devices

<sup>17</sup> Konchev 2019: 395-397.

We are pointing out a small part of the active schools that develop cheerleading sports: SOU 'I. Vazov' – town Varshets; Primary school, I. Vazov – G. Oryahovitsa; SOU 'I. Vazov' – the town of Svoje; 'Hr. Botev' – the town of Sandanski; Elisaveta Bagryana Primary School – Sliven; SU 'V. Levski' – the town of Vetovo; Primary school 'Dragan Manchov' – Plovdiv, etc. There are many schools that develop this entertaining and recreational motor practice. Cheerleading is defined as a sports-acrobatic competition activity for high sportsmanship. It is a discipline with more difficult technique than other cheerleading sports with elements of acrobatics, gymnastics and balance. Sports specialists and the Bulgarian Cheerleading Union (BCU) accept the specification and international terminology, so most terms are authentic and do not have a direct translation, applying the specific requirements of disciplines (but in light or real conditions at the local level). According to the requirements of international structures, cheerleading sports and categories are characterized as follows:

**Cheerdance:**

- Team Cheer Freestyle Pom
- Team Cheer Jazz
- Team Cheer Hip Hop
- Freestyle Pom Doubles
- Jazz Doubles
- Hip Hop Doubles

**Baton Twirling:**

- Solo One Baton
- Solo Two Batons
- Team / Corps

**Cheerleading:**

- Team Cheer All Girl
- Team Cheer Coed
- Group Stunt All Girl
- Group Stunt Coed
- Partner Stunt Coed

**CONCLUSION**

From the above analysis, we come to the following conclusions:

- The established trends in Bulgaria contribute to the implementation of a healthy lifestyle through cheerleading and sustainable development of the school environment.

- The emotional dynamics and social activity of the students increases. Outside the classroom form of education expands the motor activity achieved through the subject FVS.

- In social terms, cheerleading dance performances allow equal access and motor realization of both sexes, which is one of the requirements for inclusion in the Olympic program.

- They socialize young people, learn to lead a healthy lifestyle and ensure physical, mental and emotional health.

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## Мажоретните спортове – инструмент за постигане на уелнес (Wellness) култура в българското училище

Ирина Нешева

Изследването има за цел да представи на вниманието на учениците и, разкрие същността на мажоретните спортове, като практики от извън класна дейност в българските училища. **Методика:** Осъществен е систематичен преглед на използването на инструментариум, свързан с мажоретните спортове и изследване динамиката на спортни резултати от спортни клубове по мажоретни дисциплини. **Резултати:** систематизирана е класификационна структура на мажоретните спортове. Анализирани са динамиката на българския спортен резултат по дисциплини. **Дискусия:** училищното обучение е свързано с интензивност на учебните програми, което предполага съхраняване и поддържане на висока работоспособност и мотивация на учениците за участие в разнообразни спортни формати. **Заклучение:** установените тенденции относно мажоретните спортове в България корелират с устойчивост на двигателната и социална активност.

