Why does student interest matter?

When students are interested in the content they are learning, they tend to learn more. Further, student attitudes about learning tend to improve as their interest is stimulated, leading again to greater levels of learning.

As student interest increases, so do other positive learning behaviors – like generating questions, independent problem-solving, seeking deeper explanations, and more. In addition, as levels of interest increase, students are more likely to engage in course-related activity (e.g., studying, working on projects, etc.) for longer periods of time – positively influencing student learning.

Student interest sparked
Learners:
Require others to guide content engagement.
May have positive or negative feelings.
Pay attention to content, if somewhat briefly.
May or may not be reflectively aware of the experience.

Continued student interest
Learners:
Reengage content that was previously introduced.
Require support to make connections between skills, knowledge, and prior experience.
Develop a sense of value of the content.
Have positive feelings.

Emerging personal interest
Learners:
Are likely to reengage content independently.
Show curiosity and are focused on developing questions and seeking answers.
Have stored content knowledge.
Have positive feelings.

High-level personal interest
Learners:
Independently reengage content.
Exhibit high curiosity — ask a lot of questions and actively seek feedback.
Are able to persevere through frustration and challenges to meet goals.

(Adapted from Renninger & Riley, 2013; Renninger & Su, 2012)
STRATEGIES FOR INCREASING STUDENT INTEREST:

- **Create active and interactive learning experiences**
  Student interest in content can be triggered and maintained through experiences where students are actively engaged with content and concepts instead of passively receiving information.

- **Introduce moments of novelty**
  Use suspense and surprise, demonstrations, stories, and videos to promote curiosity.

- **Construct assignments that give students some degree of choice**
  Research shows that students’ choice of a topic of interest to them, not just the act of choice, increases their engagement, motivation, and interest in the content and task.

- **Help students see the purpose and value of what they are learning**
  Students take more intrinsic interest in content and perceive content to be meaningful when they can make connections to materials that are relevant to their own experiences and goals.

- **Generate “ah-ha!” experiences**
  By layering questions and engaging students in reflection on their responses – both in class and with out-of-class work – you can lead students along a path from a starting point to a realization of something important or noteworthy about the content they are learning.

- **Use verbal cues to demonstrate appeal of content**
  Try using verbal cues to draw student attention to important and interesting ideas with statements such as “This next topic is really key because we will return to it again and again…”

REFERENCES


http://learningenvironment.ctl.gatech.edu