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## Children's Problem Solving in the Novel “Sahabat Dari Marikh” Based on Behavioural Cognitive Therapy

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### Abstract

Problem solving is a step taken to prevent a problem or damage from continuing. There are stages that need to be implemented before the problem can be successfully addressed. Therefore, the approach used in Behavioural Cognitive Therapy can guide children to identify problems and solve them appropriately. In addition, children also experience problems in their lives and these need to be resolved in order to form mental and physical health. Children also face problems in their lives and these need to be resolved in order to develop good mental and physical health. Most of the time, children interact with the community, such as family members, teachers, neighbours and peers when they are at school or at home. This will indirectly cause them to face problems which can interfere with their daily activities. Therefore, studies on children's novels that won writing competition will be done so that problem solving methods in children's reading materials could be used to educate readers. This is due to the fact that novels could have a deep impact and influence on readers, including children. Hence, the children's novel entitled “Sahabat dari Marikh” is chosen because this novel is the latest novel published in 2020 and it also won the Space Science Novel Writing competition in 2014. Furthermore, this novel is published by Dewan Bahasa and Pustaka, a statutory body entrusted by the government to raise the standard of Malay language and Malay literature, including children's literature. Therefore, it is appropriate to conduct a study on this novel in order to fulfil its purpose of educating and advising the society.

**Keywords:** Problem Solving, Therapy, Cognitive, Behaviour, Novel, Children

### Introduction

In literature, novels are considered popular among readers. Novels have become a medium to describe various social issues to be thought about and used for reflection. Novels usually show the nature of human reality in life, determining their direction and purpose, interacting with each other, interacting with nature, appreciating the present and reminiscing the past. The relationship between humans is a process that creates a community aiming at continuity

of life. Therefore, such interaction among individuals will trigger various conflicts that require a solution which can lead towards reconciliation. Conflict, according to Zaini (2019: 2), refers to opposition or conflict resulting from unequal goals between two or more parties on a particular topic. Conflict is also viewed as a violent situation which must be avoided in order to facilitate reconciliation. This understanding makes it obvious that conflict is a negative situation that affects community members, and that it needs to be avoided by taking various actions that are thought to be appropriate to establish harmony in the community. Therefore, with the existence of conflict in the community, it is appropriate to take proactive steps in dealing with the problems that occur so that they do not affect the harmonious relationship among members of a community. Therefore, according to Azizi (2005: 245), problem solving is a systematic process that begins by realizing the existence of a problem and analyzing the problem. This analysis aims to see important issues and subjects before the best solution is taken until a decision is obtained. Problem solving needs to be done systematically and regularly through methods which are appropriate with the situation in order to optimize the results. Children also need to be taught a more organized method in dealing with problems to prevent depression among them resulting from problems which couldn't be solved on their own. Such education should be delivered through a medium which is considered suitable for their understanding and reading level. There are studies that show that children who are able to read will be interested in reading the novel genre compared to other genres in children's literature. Children should be educated through a medium, deemed appropriate for both their comprehension and literacy ability. Studies indicate that readers will be more interested in reading novels compared to other categories of childrens' books.

### **Limitations of The Study**

This study focuses on the novel "Sahabat dari Marikh" by Marini Azahri which won the DBP Space Science Novel Writing Competition 2013/14, organized by Dewan Bahasa and Pustaka. However, this novel was published in 2020, six years later. Thus, this most recent published children's novel should be evaluated to educate children in comprehending ways to solve problems.

This novel revolves around a child named Haikal who befriends a space child from the Marikh. Haikal changed the child's name to Adam in order to safe guard his disguise on earth. Meanwhile, there is a conflict when Haikal's younger brother, Haziq was kidnapped by a group of criminals who wanted to steal the findings of Haikal's scientist father's research. Adam managed to help Haikal to save Haziq by using space technology. Various ways and decisions were used by the duo to succeed in their rescue mission.

Such scenario needs to be addressed because the conflict in this book focuses on child abduction. This issue is currently increasing and affecting the community, hence causing anxiety among members of the community.

### **Problem Statement**

This study derives from research which emphasized the need for a special approach to help children in solving their daily life problems. Children as members of society are not spared from conflicts which occur in their environment. Therefore, children need to be educated so that they are able to solve their own problems without feeling pressure from within which could affect them psychologically. Saadiq (2022) cites a research from Behavioural Research and Therapy which claims that depressed children who are lack of problem solving skills are

more likely to be depressed. This group of children faces various problems in their daily lives, ranging from academic problems to sports events. However, only a handful of children have the formula to solve problems which they face. With this knowledge, studies should be done on steps taken by children to resolve their problems. Therefore, children's novels are considered the best solution as novels are reading materials which have the most impact on childrens' lives.

### **Metodology**

This study will use problem solving methods as applied by Firdaus Mukhtar and Tian Po Oei in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. In this method, there are nine stages in problem solving. According to Firdaus and Tian (2011: 135), problem solving skill is a useful method in everyday life. The recommended steps are important for dealing with anxiety and depression. Therefore, the main thing to do is to stop thinking about the problem in a negative way or in an ineffective way that increases depression. Hence, this study will employ problem solving methods used in Behavioural Cognitive Therapy by Firdaus Mukhtar and Tian Po Oei, which involves nine stages.

Firdaus and Tian (2011: 135), outlined the nine stages that must be applied to address issues which arise. Stage 1 is to decide on the problem to be solved first. Although in some situations, you may be faced with several problems that need to be solved at once, try to select and filter the problems according to importance and set aside issues which are of less importance and focus only on one problem. In Stage 2, if the problem is too complex and complicated, try to divide the problem into several parts whereas Stage 3 is to decide on the best solution.

Stage 4 involves brainstorming as many potential solutions as possible but do not evaluate or criticise any ideas presented. All you need to do is put each thought on paper. Stage 5 then involves making an effort to realistically reevaluate each concept that has been put forth. Make a note of the following for each answer, the advantages and disadvantages, the immediate and long-term effects, your degree of willingness, and the level of your willingness to adopt the chosen method. Next is step 6 which is to decide the chosen solution after taking into account all the informations, pros and cons, , short and long term effects and your commitment towards solving the issues. Stage 7 involves planning an action plan to implement the solution, including what you need to do, how to do and when to do it. Complete Stage 8 by giving yourself the opportunity to carry out the action plan. The last stage which is Stage 9 is to evaluate the effectiveness of the solution. This stage determines whether the problem is solved or not. If not, you need more informations to tackle the problem. Or is there any chance that the stipulated problem is not really a problem. Also, are there other more serious problems and finally are other ideas more effective.

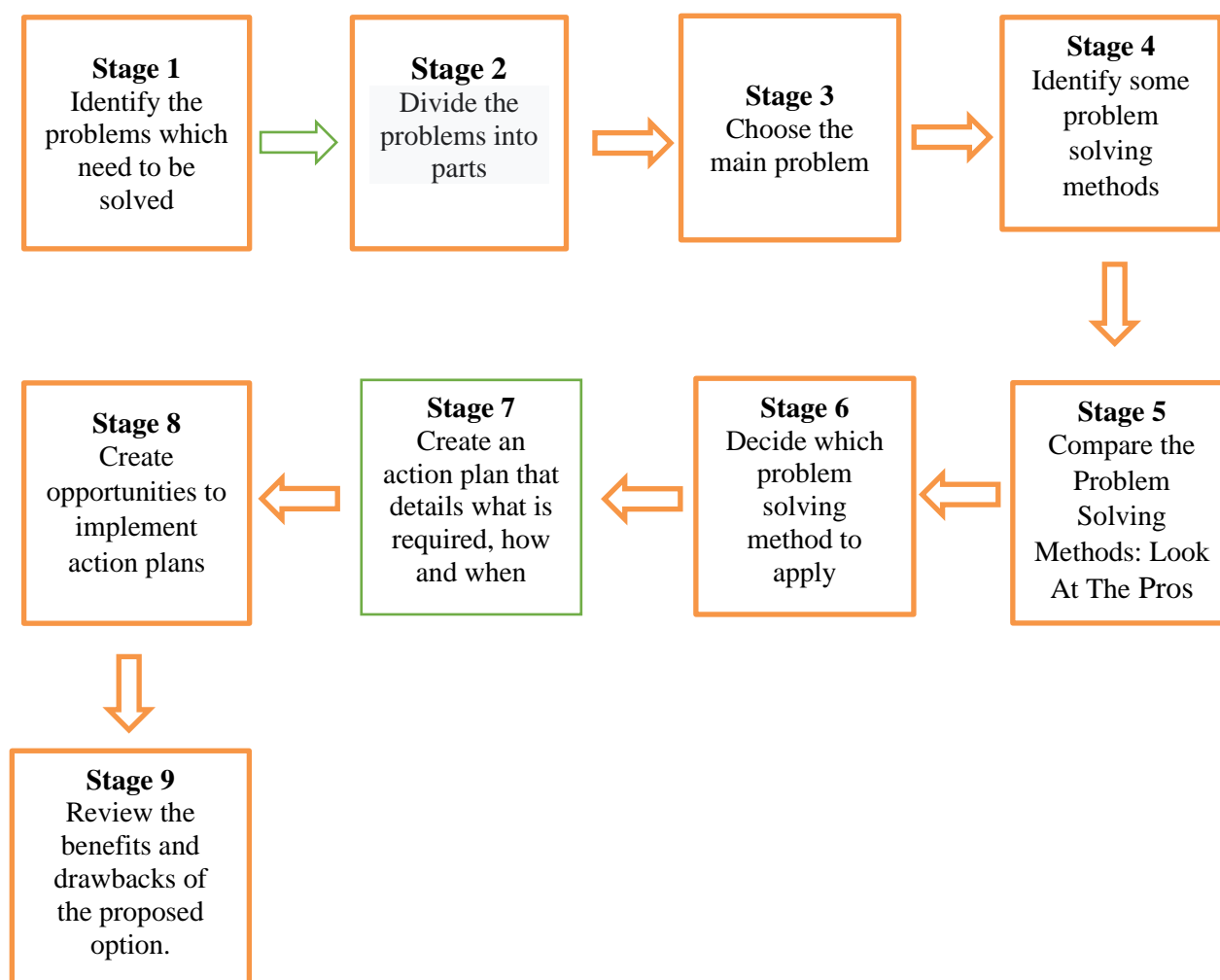


Figure 1: Stages of Problem Solving in Behavioural Cognitive Therapy (Firdaus and Tian, 2011: 135)

### Analysis

It has been identified that the main conflict in “Sahabat dari Marikh” requires serious attention as the main character’s family members have been abducted by a group of criminals and held as captives in order to obtain the findings of Haikal’s father’s research.

### To Rescue Family Members Kidnapped by Criminals

Both children and adults are frequently abducted. This heinous act happened due to various motives including extortion, revenge and human trafficking crimes which are common among people in the country.

According to Azrone (2018), a total of 33 cases of child abduction for ransom were reported for the last 10 years. The society finds this to be extremely troubling. Therefore, it needs to be addressed as effectively as possible to ensure the health and safety of the next generation. Such situations could be avoided by taking various safety precautions such as keeping an eye on children’s movement and accompanying them when they are outside or

in potentially hazardous areas. Below is an excerpt from the novel "Sahabat dari Marikh" which illustrates the crime of kidnapping.

"Hey boy! Your father has reported this to the police. We have no choice but to kill you!" Shouted the man as he dragged Haikal back into the bungalow. Haikal felt dizzy hearing the man's words (Azahri, 2020: 125)

The above excerpt shows Haikal witnessing the abduction of his younger brother, Haziq by a group of criminals who threatened to kill Haziq because his father had reported the incident to the police. This action needs to be referred to the authorities to enable them to take appropriate actions to save the kidnapped victim and to protect the victim from unwanted incidents. However, it is clear that Haikal and his friend, Adam have taken brave actions by trying to solve the problem while waiting for the police to arrive at the scene of the incident.

The following excerpt demonstrates how the characters in this novel go about solving issues.

### STAGE 1

My brother is about to die, yet you stopped me from saving him?" Haikal answered in a subdued tone. "I do want your brother to be safe but we can't just simply launch an attack. They are big in numbers and have many weapons. You want to die? Adam reprimanded Haikal again. Haikal was silent. His breathing was audible. He made an effort to relax but his pulse was racing with fear (Azahri, 2020: 127)

The above excerpt shows how Haikal maintain his composure in the face of difficulties. The best course of action before planning the next step of action is to approach an issue with a calm attitude. This is because someone who is calm can think think better and come up with the best solution and those actions are unaffected by emotions which could thwart any rescue efforts.

This is in line with the approach as in Stage 1, that is problem solving process in accordance to the Behavioural Cognitive Therapy method. This actions is identified as the main step in dealing with one's emotional problem to obtain peace of mind so that one can think rationally, without the interference of emotions so that he or she is able to identify the problems that need to be solved. Try to select and filter again according to priority. Set aside what is necessary and only focus on one problem. As such, Adam played his role in calming Haikal's action in order to solve the main problem.

### STAGE 2

The relevance of problem solving contained in the children's novel "Sahabat dari Marikh" is:

Since they were still kids, Adam asked Haikal to go to the end of the village. "I want you to go to the phone booth and call the police. Provide informations on where the criminal is." said Adam while trying to save Haziq. (Marini Azahri, 2020: 129)

The above excerpt shows that the characters in this novel could identify the problems they face. Therefore, Adam divides their problems into two parts. First, Adam asks Haikal to

call the police for help because as children, they are incapable to challenge adults who are equipped with firearms. For the second problem, with the skills learned, Adam succeeded in saving Haziq who was held hostage. This is in line with the approach in Stage 2 of the problem solving process according to the Behavioural Cognitive Therapy method whereby at this stage, the problems faced need to be divided into several parts to be dealt with.

### STAGE 3

The relevance of problem solving in “Sahabat from Marikh” is as follow:

“I will enter the bungalow to save Haziq now. I will find Haziq with the help of Rora,” said Adam calmly. Haziq was stunned to hear Adam’s suggestion. “Are you crazy? You could die, you know? Your secrets could also be exposed!” (Azahri, 2020: 127)

Based on the excerpt above, it can be seen that the characters in this novel have set a decision for the purpose of rescue. The character acts in such manner because he is confident of his ability to succeed. It is stated that Adam was military trained on his planet and is capable of taking down criminals who generally have better physique. Coupled with the help of advanced technology from his planet, he was able to carry out the task brilliantly.

This is in line with the strategy used in Stage 3 of the problem solving process as described by the Cognitive Behavioural Therapy method.

### STAGE 4

Further relevance of problem solving as in the novel “Sahabat dari Marikh” is:

“I want to go to the phone booth to call the police. Give them information on the whereabouts of the criminals,” said Adam.

“Phone booth? Why don’t you use my phone?” Haikal took out his smartphone from his pants pocket (Azahri, 2020: 129)

The above excerpt indicates that the character uses problem solving at the fourth stage, which is providing a choice of plans to be used. Haikal suggested calling the police by using his cell phone as that will speed up delivery of information to the police compared to Adam’s suggestion of going to a nearby phone booth. However, after being briefed by Adam, Haikal understood Adam’s way of solving the problem.

That is in accordance to the approach as in Stage 4 of problem solving in Behavioural Cognitive Therapy method.

### STAGE 5

Example of the relevance of problem solving in “Sahabat dari Marikh” as in Stage 5:

“If we use your phone, your number could be traced by the police. What would you answer, then if the police asks how do you know that the criminals are here?” (Azahri, 2020: 129)

Thus, a debate is seen here, showing the pros and cons between the suggested options provided by both children. This is explained by using certain logics and justifications in deciding the best suggestion to implement.

The above is in line with the approach in Stage 5 of the problem solving process according to the Behavioural Cognitive Therapy method, which takes into consideration the pros and cons of a solution.

### **STAGE 6**

The relevance of problem solving in “Sahabat dari Marikh” pertaining to Stage 6:

Haikal sped off to the phone booth. He dialled the number of the police station with trembling hands. When the line was picked up, he tried to calm down and pretended to be one of the residents of Kampung Cendana. He quickly gave informations about Haziq’s abduction (Azahri, 2020: 131)

However, after consideration, Haikal gives in to Adam’s plea to use a public phone to contact the police and disguises himself as a civilian due to fear of their secrets being revealed. This is in line with the approach in stage 6 of the problem solving process as in the Behavioural Cognitive Therapy method as Adam decided to save Haziq.

### **STAGE 7**

The relevance of problem solving in “Sahabat dari Marikh” pertaining to Stage 6:

“You’ll probable take five minutes if you could run like a sprinter.” Said Adam while Adam rushed and left (Azahri, 2020: 129)

Adam’s instructions to Haikal is depicted in Stage 7, whereby Adam has developed a plan to contact the police. Despite the advanced technology which he has, Adam could still determine the means and time it takes to reach the phone booth. This is in line with Stage 7 of the problem solving process as in the Behavioural Cognitive Therapy method.

### **STAGE 8**

The relevance of problem solving in “Sahabat dari Marikh” as in Stage 8:

“I hate to tell you this, but in order for you to be more convinced, I have to. I was actually one of the kids undergoing detective or investigator training at the Indigo Children’s Centre on Mars. Believe me, I can save Haziq.” (Marini Azahri, 2020: 128)

Based on the excerpt above, Adam has succeeded in creating an opportunity for himself to act. Even as a child, he is able to convince Haikal to accept his point of view in saving Haziq. This correlate with the approach in Stage 8 of the problem solving process as described in the Behavioural Cognitive Therapy method, whereby Adam could generate chances to execute his action plans.

### **STAGE 9**

The relevance of problem solving in “Sahabat dari Marikh” as in Stage 9:

Suddenly, Haikal heard a loud police siren. He was taken aback. It seems the police have arrived earlier than expected. Haikal just realized that he shouldn’t be



there. His presence will raise suspicion to the police. He hurriedly lifted Haziq to a safer place, where the police could easily find him. (Marini Azahri, 2020: 134)

Their planned decision saved the life of Haziq and their secrets were also not revealed as the police couldn't identify the individual who lodged the report. This is in line with the approach in Stage 9 of the Behavioural Cognitive Therapy which evaluate the effectiveness of the chosen solution.

### Conclusion

To conclude, "Sahabat dari Marikh" by Marini Azahri is an interesting novel to be used as a research material. Through this study, it is found that the story telling technique used to address the issues in this novel is compatible with the Behavioural Cognitive Therapy method. Thus, it is proven that "Sahabat dari Marikh" does educate its readers, especially children regarding the course of actions to take when resolving problems under pressure. The steps taken by the author to solve problems in this novel are compatible with the Behavioural Cognitive Therapy method.

The result of this study shows that the story is well narrated and a good source of education for readers, especially children when they are faced with problems. "Sahabat dari Marikh" befits the category of children's novel through its main character, Haikal who is a primary schooler and often makes uncertain decisions in dealing with problems. Children's image such as mocking, inquisitive, wanting to win, low self-esteem, hardworking and not daring to make decisions which befit Stage 4 of Erikson's theory of psychosocial development.

Stage	Stages of Problem Solving in Behavioural Cognitive Therapy	Novel <i>Sahabat Dari Marikh</i> : Stages of Problem Solving in Behavioural Cognitive Therapy
1	Identify the problems which need to be solved	<i>Haikal who was facing a problem was asked to calm down to solve the problem faced by his friend. (Marini Azahri, 2020: 127)</i>
2	Divide the problems into parts	<i>Haikal divided the problem faced into several parts. (Marini Azahri, 2020: 129)</i>
3	Choose the main problem	<i>Haikal could determined his main problem. (Marini Azahri, 2020: 127)</i>
4	Identify some problem solving methods	<i>Haikal and Adam discussed and gave insights to solve the problem. (Marini Azahri, 2020: 129)</i>
5	Compare the Problem Solving Methods: Look At The Pros and Cons	<i>Adam explained the actions that needed to be taken. (Marini Azahri, 2020: 129)</i>
6	Decide which problem solving method to apply	<i>Haikal accepted Adam's suggestion and followed his plans. (Marini Azahri, 2020: 130 – 131)</i>

7	Create an action plan that details what is required, how and when	<i>Adam gave an overview of the plan to save Haikal's sister. (Marini Azahri, 2020: 129)</i>
8	Create opportunities to implement action plans	<i>Adam explained his ability to save Haikal's sister. (Marini Azahri, 2020: 128)</i>
9	Review the benefits and drawbacks of the proposed option.	<i>Haikal was aware of Adam's wisdom in the mission to save his abducted sister. (Marini Azahri, 2020: 134)</i>

Figure 2: Novel *Sahabat Dari Marikh*: Stages of Problem Solving in Behavioural Cognitive Therapy

Based on the Behavioural Cognitive Therapy method and Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, this novel succeeds in providing an interesting narration by developing steps in dealing with problems and stress faced by children. Readers, particularly children can benefit from an approach that is compatible with their behaviour in learning how to solve problems. The researcher hopes that more works will be published to benefit children and readers. In fact, novels like this should be recognized as reading resources for school students and become part of a more meaningful teaching and learning activity. As a result, this can build positive personality traits and characters in children's problem-solving skills. This research is also crucial in promoting to children's writers to create narration based on the Behavioural Cognitive Theory. Thus, this can attract and provide opportunities for new researchers to look on the literature genres especially novels, short stories and play which incorporate the Behavioural Cognitive Theory. Furthermore, the production of meaningful literature work like this can convince parents to approve and give permission to their children to own it.

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